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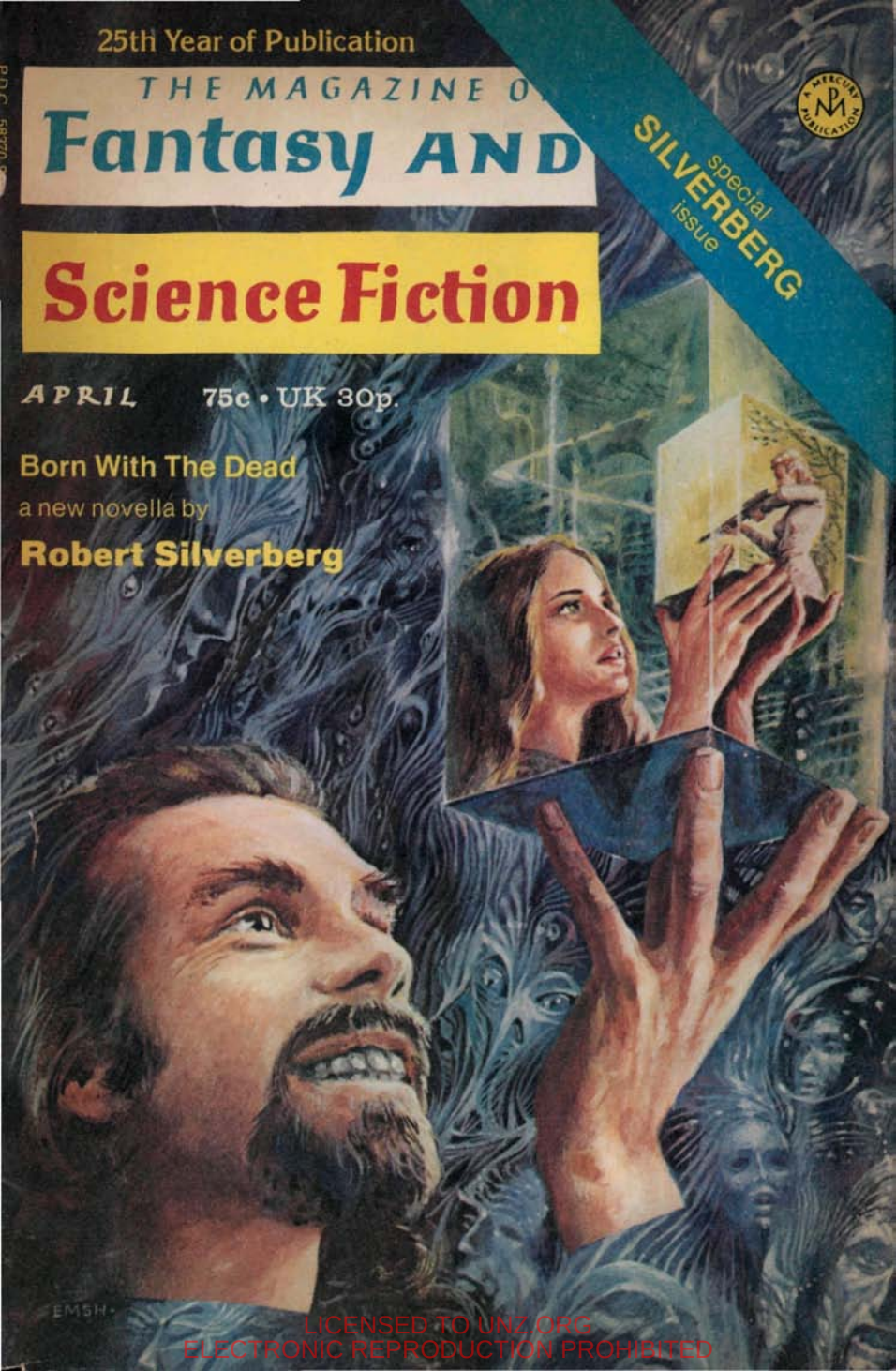
Born With The Dead
a new novella by
Robert Silverberg



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Fantasy and Science Fiction

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Later on, you will be able to read about Robert Silverberg and about his work, but for now consider only this story. F&SF's special one-author issues have generated some extraordinary fiction, but even in that company, "Born With The Dead" is, we think, a standout. It is a rich and powerful story about love and death and a kind of immortality; we are proud to offer it as the centerpiece of this special Silverberg issue.

Born With The Dead

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

1.

And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.

T.S. Eliot: *Little Gidding*

Supposedly his late wife Sybille was on her way to Zanzibar. That was what they told him, and he believed it. Jorge Klein had reached that stage in his search when he would believe anything, if belief would only lead him to Sybille. Anyway, it wasn't so absurd that she would go to Zanzibar. Sybille had always wanted to go there. In some unfathomable obsessive way the place had seized the center of her consciousness long ago. When she was alive, it hadn't been possible for her to go there, but now, loosed from all bonds, she would be drawn toward Zanzibar like a bird to its nest, like Ulysses to Ithaca, like a moth to a flame.

The plane, a small Air Zanzibar Havilland FP-803, took off more

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than half empty from Dar es Salaam at 0915 on a mild bright morning, gaily circled above the dense masses of mango trees, red-flowering flamboyants, and tall coconut palms along the aquamarine shores of the Indian Ocean, and headed northward on the short hop across the strait to Zanzibar. This day — Tuesday, the 9th of March, 1993 — would be an unusual one for Zanzibar: five deads were aboard the plane, the first of their kind ever to visit that fragrant isle. Daud Mahmoud Barwani, the health officer on duty that morning at Zanzibar's Karume Airport, had been warned of this by the emigration officials on the mainland. He had no idea how he was going to handle the situation, and he was apprehensive: these were tense times in Zanzibar. Times are always tense in Zanzibar. Should he refuse them entry? Did deads pose any threat to Zanzibar's ever-precarious political stability? What about subtler menaces? Deads might be carriers of dangerous spiritual maladies. Was there anything in the Revised Administrative Code about refusing visas on grounds of suspected contagions of the spirit? Daud Mahmoud Barwani nibbled moodily at his breakfast — a cold chapati, a mound of cold curried potato — and waited without eagerness for the deads.

Almost two and a half years had passed since Jorge Klein had last seen Sybille: the afternoon of Saturday, October 13, 1990, the day of her funeral. That day she lay in her casket as though merely asleep, her beauty altogether unmarred by her final ordeal: pale skin, dark lustrous hair, delicate nostrils, full lips. Iridescent gold and violet fabric enfolded her serene body; a shimmering electrostatic haze, faintly perfumed with a jasmine fragrance, protected her from decay. For five hours she floated on the dais while the rites of parting were read and the condolences were offered — offered almost furtively, as if her death were a thing too monstrous to acknowledge with a show of strong feeling; then, when only a few people remained, the inner core of their circle of friends, Klein kissed her lightly on the lips and surrendered her to the silent dark-clad men whom the Cold Town had sent. She had asked in her will to be rekindled; they took her away in a black van to work their magic on her corpse. The casket, retreating on their broad shoulders, seemed to Klein to be disappearing into a throbbing gray vortex that he was helpless to penetrate. Presumably he would never hear from her again. In those days the deads kept strictly to themselves, sequestered behind the walls of their self-

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imposed ghettos; it was rare ever to see one outside the Cold Towns, rare even for one of them to make oblique contact with the world of the living.

So a redefinition of their relationship was forced on him. For nine years it had been Jorge and Sybille, Sybille and Jorge, I and thou forming *we*, above all *we*, a transcendental *we*.. He had loved her with almost painful intensity. In life they had gone everywhere together, had done everything together, shared research tasks and classroom assignments, thought interchangeable thoughts, expressed tastes that were nearly always identical, so completely had each permeated the other. She was a part of him, he of her, and until the moment of her unexpected death he had assumed it would be like that forever. They were still young, he 38, she 34, decades to look forward to. Then she was gone. And now they were mere anonymities to one another, she not Sybille but only a dead, he not Jorge but only a warm. She was somewhere on the North American continent, walking about, talking, eating, reading, and yet she was gone, lost to him, and it behooved him to accept that alteration in his life, and outwardly he did accept it, but yet, though he knew he could never again have things as they once had been, he allowed himself the indulgence of a lingering wistful hope of regaining her.

Shortly the plane was in view, dark against the brightness of the sky, a suspended mote, an irritating fleck in Barwani's eye, growing larger, causing him to blink and sneeze. Barwani was not ready for it. When Ameri Kombo, the flight controller in the cubicle next door, phoned him with the routine announcement of the landing, Barwani replied, "Notify the pilot that no one is to debark until I have given clearance. I must consult the regulations. There is possibly a peril to public health." For twenty minutes he let the plane sit, all hatches sealed, on the quiet runway. Wandering goats emerged from the shrubbery and inspected it. Barwani consulted no regulations. He finished his modest meal; then he folded his arms and sought to attain the proper state of tranquillity. These deads, he told himself, could do no harm. They were people like all other people, except that they had undergone extraordinary medical treatment. He must overcome his superstitious fear of them: he was no peasant, no silly clove picker, nor was Zanzibar an abode of primitives. He would admit them; he would give them their antimalaria tablets as though they were ordinary tourists; he would send them on their way. Very

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well. Now he was ready. He phoned Ameri Kombo. "There is no danger," he said. "The passengers may exit."

There were nine altogether, a sparse load. The four warms emerged first, looking somber and a little congealed, like people who had had to travel with a party of uncaged cobras. Barwani knew them all: the German consul's wife, the merchant Chowdhary's son, and two Chinese engineers, all returning from brief holidays in Dar. He waved them through the gate without formalities. Then came the deads, after an interval of half a minute; probably they had been sitting together at one end of the nearly empty plane, and the others had been at the other. There were two women, three men, all of them tall and surprisingly robust-looking. He had expected them to shamble, to shuffle, to limp, to falter, but they moved with aggressive strides, as if they were in better health now than when they had been alive. When they reached the gate, Barwani stepped forward to greet them, saying softly, "Health regulations, come this way, kindly." They were breathing, undoubtedly breathing; he tasted an emanation of liquor from the big red-haired man, a mysterious and pleasant sweet flavor, perhaps anise, from the dark-haired woman. It seemed to Barwani that their skins had an odd waxy texture, an unreal glossiness, but possibly that was his imagination; white skins had always looked artificial to him. The only certain difference he could detect about the deads was in their eyes, a way they had of remaining unnervingly fixed in a single intense gaze for many seconds before shifting. Those were the eyes, Barwani thought, of people who had looked upon the Emptiness without having been swallowed into it. A turbulence of questions erupted within him: What is it like, how do you feel, what do you remember, where did you go? He left them unspoken. Politely he said, "Welcome to the isle of cloves. We ask you to observe that malaria has been wholly eradicated here through extensive precautionary measures, and to prevent recurrence of unwanted disease we require of you that you take these tablets before proceeding further." Tourists often objected to that; these people swallowed their pills without a word of protest. Again Barwani yearned to reach toward them, to achieve some sort of contact that might perhaps help him to transcend the leaden weight of being. But an aura, a shield of strangeness, surrounded these five; and though he was an amiable man who tended to fall into conversations easily with strangers, he passed them on in

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silence to Mponda the immigration man. Mponda's high forehead was shiny with sweat, and he chewed at his lower lip; evidently he was as disturbed by the deads as Barwani. He fumbled forms, he stamped a visa in the wrong place, he stammered while telling the deads that he must keep their passports overnight. "I shall post them by messenger to your hotel in the morning," Mponda promised them, and sent the visitors onward to the baggage pickup area with undue haste.

Klein had only one friend with whom he dared talk about it, a colleague of his at UCLA, a sleek Parsee sociologist from Bombay named Framji Jijibhoi, who was as deep into the elaborate new subculture of the deads as a warm could get. "How can I accept this?" Klein demanded. "I can't accept it at all. She's out there somewhere, she's alive, she's —" Jijibhoi cut him off with a quick flick of his fingertips. "No, dear friend," he said sadly, "not alive, not alive at all, merely rekindled. You must learn to grasp the distinction." Klein could not learn to grasp the distinction. Klein could not learn to grasp anything having to do with Sybille's death. He could not bear to think that she had passed into another existence from which he was totally excluded. To find her, to speak to her, to participate in her experience of death and whatever lay beyond death, became his only purpose. He was inextricably bound to her, as though she were still his wife, as though Jorge-and-Sybille still existed in any way.

He waited for letters from her, but none came. After a few months he began trying to trace her, embarrassed by his own compulsiveness and by his increasingly open breaches of the etiquette of this sort of widowerhood. He traveled from one Cold Town to another — Sacramento, Boise, Ann Arbor, Louisville — but none would admit him, none would even answer his questions. Friends passed on rumors to him, that she was living among the deads of Tucson, of Roanoke, of Rochester, of San Diego, but nothing came of these tales; then Jijibhoi, who had tentacles into the world of the rekindled in many places and who was aiding Klein in his quest even though he disapproved of its goal, brought him an authoritative-sounding report that she was at Zion Cold Town in southeastern Utah. They turned him away there too, but not entirely cruelly, for he did manage to secure plausible evidence that that was where Sybille really was.

In the summer of '92 Jijibhoi told him that Sybille had emerged from Cold Town seclusion. She had

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been seen, he said, in Newark, Ohio, touring the municipal golf course at Octagon State Memorial in the company of a swaggering red-haired archaeologist named Kent Zacharias, also a dead, formerly a specialist in the mound-building Hopewellian cultures of the Ohio Valley. "It is a new phase," said Jijibhoi, "not unanticipated. The deads are beginning to abandon their early philosophy of total separtism. We have started to observe them as tourists visiting our world — exploring the life-death interface, as they like to term it. It will be very interesting, dear friend." Klein flew at once to Ohio and, without ever actually seeing her, tracked her from Newark to Chillicothe, from Chillicothe to Marietta, from Marietta into West Virginia, where he lost her trail somewhere between Moundsville and Wheeling. Two months later she was said to be in London, then in Cairo, then Addis Ababa. Early in '93 Klein learned, via the scholarly grapevine — an ex-Californian now at Nyerere University in Arusha — that Sybille was on safari in Tanzania and was planning to go, in a few weeks, across to Zanzibar.

Of course. For ten years she had been working on a doctoral thesis on the establishment of the Arab Sultanate in Zanzibar in the early nineteenth century — studies unavoidably interrupted by other academic chores, by love affairs, by marriage, by financial reverses, by illnesses, death, and other responsibilities — and she had never actually been able to visit the island that was so central to her. Now she was free of all entanglements. Why shouldn't she go to Zanzibar at last? Why not? Of course: she was heading for Zanzibar. And so Klein would go to Zanzibar too, to wait for her.

As the five disappeared into taxis, something occurred to Barwani. He asked Mponda for the passports and scrutinized the names. Such strange ones: Kent Zacharias, Nerita Tracy, Sybille Klein, Anthony Gracchus, Laurence Mortimer. He had never grown accustomed to the names of Europeans. Without the photographs he would be unable to tell which were the woman, which the men. Zacharias, Tracy, Klein... ah. *Klein*. He checked a memo, two weeks old, tacked to his desk. Klein, yes. Barwani telephoned the Shirazi Hotel — a project that consumed several minutes — and asked to speak with the American who had arrived ten days before, that slender man whose lips had been pressed tight in tension, whose eyes had glittered with fatigue, the one who had asked a little service of Barwani, a special favor, and had

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dashed him a much-needed hundred shillings as payment in advance. There was a lengthy delay, no doubt while porters searched the hotel, looking in the man's room, the bar, the lounge, the garden; and then the American was on the line. "The person about whom you inquired has just arrived, sir," Barwani told him.

2.

> The dance begins. Worms underneath fingertips, lips beginning to pulse, heartache and throat-catch. All slightly out of step and out of key, each its own tempo and rhythm. Slowly, connections. Lip to lip, heart to heart, finding self in other, dreadfully, tentatively, burning...notes finding themselves in chords, chords in sequence, cacophony turning to polyphonous contrapuntal chorus, a diapason of celebration.
>
> R.D. Laing:
> *The Bird of Paradise*

Sybille stands timidly at the edge of the municipal golf course at Octagon State Memorial in Newark, Ohio, holding her sandals in her hand and surreptitiously working her toes into the lush, immaculate carpet of dense, close-cropped lime-green grass. It is a summer afternoon in 1992, very hot; the air, beautifully translucent, has that timeless Midwestern shimmer, and the droplets of water from the morning sprinkling have not yet burned off the lawn. Such extraordinary grass! She hadn't often seen grass like that in California, and certainly not at Zion Cold Town in thirsty Utah. Kent Zacharias, towering beside her, shakes his head sadly. "A golf course!" he mutters. "One of the most important prehistoric sites in North America, and they make a golf course out of it! Well, I suppose it could have been worse. They might have bulldozed the whole thing and turned it into a municipal parking lot. Look, there, do you see the earthworks?"

She is trembling. This is her first extended journey outside the Cold Town, her first venture into the world of the warms since her rekindling, and she is picking up threatening vibrations from all the life that burgeons about her. The park is surrounded by pleasant little houses, well kept. Children on bicycles rocket through the streets. In front of her, golfers are merrily slamming away. Little yellow golf carts clamber with lunatic energy over the rises and dips of the course. There are platoons of tourists who, like herself and Zacharias, have come to see the Indian mounds. There are dogs running free. All this seems menacing to her. Even the vegetation — the thick grass, the

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manicured shrubs, the heavy-leafed trees with low-hanging boughs — disturbs her. Nor is the nearness of Zacharias reassuring, for he too seems inflamed with undeadlike vitality; his face is florid, his gestures are broad and overanimated, as he points out the low flat-topped mounds, the grassy bumps and the ridges making up the giant joined circle and octagon of the ancient monument. Of course, these mounds are the mainspring of his being, even now, five years post-mortem. Ohio is his Zanzibar.

"—once covered four square miles. A grand ceremonial center, the Hopewellian equivalent of Chichen Itza, of Luxor, of —" He pauses. Awareness of her distress has finally filtered through the intensity of his archaeological zeal. "How are you doing?" he asks gently.

She smiles a brave smile. Moistens her lips. Inclines her head toward the golfers, toward the tourists, toward the row of darling little houses outside the rim of the park. Shudders.

"Too cheery for you, is it?"

"Much," she says.

Cheery. Yes. A cheery little town, a magazine-cover town, a chamber - of - commerce town. Newark lies becalmed on the breast of the sea of time: but for the look of the automobiles, this could be 1980 or 1960 or perhaps 1940. Yes. Motherhood, baseball, apple pie, church every Sunday. Yes. Zacharias nods and makes one of the signs of comfort at her. "Come," he whispers. "Let's go toward the heart of the complex. We'll lose the twentieth century along the way."

With brutal imperial strides he plunges into the golf course. Long-legged Sybille must work hard to keep up with him. In a moment they are within the embankment, they have entered the sacred octagon, they have penetrated the vault of the past, and at once Sybille feels they have achieved a successful crossing of the interface between life and death. How still it is here! She senses the powerful presence of the forces of death, and those dark spirits heal her unease. The encroachments of the world of the living on these precincts of the dead become insignificant: the houses outside the park are no longer in view, the golfers are mere foolish incorporeal shadows, the bustling yellow golf carts become beetles, the wandering tourists are invisible.

She is overwhelmed by the size and symmetry of the ancient site. What spirits sleep here? Zacharias conjures them, waving his hands like a magician. She has heard so much from him already about these people, these Hopewellians — "What did they call themselves?

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How can we ever know? — who heaped up these ramparts of earth twenty centuries ago. Now he brings them to life for her with gestures and low urgent words. He whispers fiercely:

— Do you see them?

And she does see them. Mists descend. The mounds reawaken; the Mound Builders appear. Tall, slender, swarthy, nearly naked, clad in shining copper breastplates, in necklaces of flint disks, in bangles of bone and mica and tortoise shell, in heavy chains of bright lumpy pearls, in rings of stone and terra cotta, in armlets of bears' teeth and panthers' teeth, in spool-shaped metal ear ornaments, in furry loincloths. Here are priests in intricately woven robes and awesome masks. Here are chieftains with crowns of copper rods, moving in frosty dignity along the long earthen-walled avenue. The eyes of these people glow with energy. What an enormously vital, enormously profligate culture they sustain here! Yet Sybille is not alienated by their throbbing vigor, for it is the vigor of the dead, the vitality of the vanished.

Look, now. Their painted faces, their unblinking gazes. This is a funeral procession. The Indians have come to these intricate geometrical enclosures to perform their acts of worship, and now, solemnly parading along the perimeters of the circle and the octagon, they pass onward, toward the mortuary zone beyond. Zacharias and Sybille are left alone in the middle of the field. He murmurs to her:

— Come. We'll follow them.

He makes it real for her. Through his cunning craft she has access to this communinty of the dead. How easily she has drifted backward across time! She learns here that she can affix herself to the sealed past at any point; it's only the present, open-ended and unpredictable, that is troublesome. She and Zacharias float through the misty meadow, no sensation of feet touching ground; leaving the octagon, they travel now down a long grassy causeway to the place of the burial mounds, at the edge of a dark forest of wide-crowned oaks. They enter a vast clearing. In the center the ground has been plastered with clay, then covered lightly with sand and fine gravel; on this base the mortuary house, a roofless, four-sided structure with walls consisting of rows of wooden palisades, has been erected. Within this is a low clay platform topped by a rectangular tomb of log cribbing, in which two bodies can be seen: a young man, a young woman, side by side, bodies fully extended, beautiful even in death. They wear copper breastplates, copper ear ornaments, copper

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bracelets, necklaces of gleaming yellowish bears' teeth.

Four priests station themselves at the corners of the mortuary house. Their faces are covered by grotesque wooden masks topped by great antlers, and they carry wands two feet long, effigies of the death-cup mushroom in wood sheathed with copper. One priest commences a harsh, percussive chant. All four lift their wands and abruptly bring them down. It is a signal; the depositing of grave goods begins. Lines of mourners bowed under heavy sacks approach the mortuary house. They are unweeping, even joyful, faces ecstatic, eyes shining, for these people know what later cultures will forget, that death is no termination but rather a natural continuation of life. Their departed friends are to be envied. They are honored with lavish gifts, so that they may live like royalty in the next world: out of the sacks some nuggets of copper, meteoric iron, silver, thousands of pearls, shell beads, beads of copper and iron, buttons of wood and stone, heaps of metal ear spools, chunks and chips of obsidian, animal effigies carved from slate and bone and tortoise shell, ceremonial copper axes and knives, scrolls cut from mica, human jawbones inlaid with turquoise, dark coarse pottery, needles of bone, sheets of woven cloth, coiled serpents fashioned from dark stone, a torrent of offerings, heaped up around and even upon the two bodies.

At length the tomb is choked with gifts. Again there is a signal from the priests. They elevate their wands, and the mourners, drawing back to the borders of the clearing, form a circle and begin to sing a somber, throbbing funeral hymn. Zacharias, after a moment, sings with them, wordlessly embellishing the melody with heavy melismas. His voice is a rich basso cantante, so unexpectedly beautiful that Sybille is moved almost to confusion by it and looks at him in awe. Abruptly he breaks off, turns to her, touches her arm, leans down to say:

—You sing too.

Sybille nods hesitantly. She joins the song, falteringly at first, her throat constricted by self-consciousness; then she finds herself becoming part of the rite, and her tone becomes more confident. Her high clear soprano soars brilliantly above the other voices.

Now another kind of offering is made: boys cover the mortuary house with heaps of kindling — twigs, dead branches, thick boughs, all sorts of combustible debris — until it is quite hidden from sight, and the priests cry a halt. Then, from the forest, comes a woman

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bearing a blazing firebrand, a girl, actually, entirely naked, her sleek fair-skinned body painted with bizarre horizontal stripes of red and green on breasts and buttocks and thighs, her long glossy black hair flowing like a cape behind her as she runs. Up to the mortuary house she sprints; breathlessly she touches the firebrand to the kindling, here, here, here, performing a wild dance as she goes, and hurls the torch into the center of the pyre. Skyward leap the flames in a ferocious rush. Sybille feels seared by the blast of heat. Swiftly the house and tomb are consumed.

While the embers still glow, the bringing of earth gets under way. Except for the priests, who remain rigid at the cardinal points of the site, and the girl who wielded the torch, who lies like discarded clothing at the edge of the clearing, the whole community takes part. There is an open pit behind a screen of nearby trees; the worshipers, forming lines, go to it and scoop up soil, carrying it to the burned mortuary house in baskets, in buckskin aprons, in big moist clods held in their bare hands. Silenty they dump their burdens on the ashes and go back for more.

Sybille glances at Zacharias; he nods; they join the line. She goes down into the pit, gouges a lump of moist black clayey soil from its side, takes it to the growing mound. Back for another, back for another. The mound rises rapidly, two feet above ground level now, three, four, a swelling circular blister, its outlines governed by the unchanging positions of the four priests, its tapering contours formed by the tamping of scores of bare feet. Yes, Sybille thinks, this is a valid way of celebrating death, this is a fitting rite. Sweat runs down her body, her clothes become stained and muddy, and still she runs to the earth quarry, runs from there to the mound, runs to the quarry, runs to the mound, runs, runs, transfigured, ecstatic.

Then the spell breaks. Something goes wrong, she does not know what, and the mists clear, the sun dazzles her eyes, the priests and the Mound Builders and the unfinished mound disappear. She and Zacharias are once again in the octagon, golf carts roaring past them on every side. Three children and their parents stand just a few feet from her, staring, staring; and a boy about ten years old points to Sybille and says in a voice that reverberates through half of Ohio, "Dad, what's wrong with those people? Why do they look so weird?" Mother gasps and cries, "*Quiet,* Tommy, don't you have any manners?" Dad, looking furious, gives the boy a stinging blow across the face with the tips of his fingers, seizes him by the wrist,

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tugs him toward the other side of the park, the whole family following in their wake.

Sybille shivers convulsively. She turns away, clasping her hands to her betraying eyes. Zacharias embraces her. "It's all right," he says tenderly. "The boy didn't know any better. It's all right."

"Take me away from here!"

"I want to show you —"

"Some other time. Take me away. To the motel. I don't want to see anything. I don't want anybody to see me."

He takes her to the motel. For an hour she lies face down on the bed, racked by dry sobs. Several times she tells Zacharias she is unready for this tour, she wants to go back to the Cold Town, but he says nothing, simply strokes the tense muscles of her back, and after a while the mood passes. She turns to him and their eyes meet and he touches her and they make love in the fashion of the deads.

3.

Newness is renewal: *ad hoc enim venit, ut renovemur in illo;* making is new again, as on the first day; *herrlick wie am ersten Tag.* Reformation, or renaissance; rebirth. Life is Phoenix-like, always being born again out of its own death. The true nature of life is resurrection; all life is life after death, a second life, reincarnation. *Totus hic ordo revolubilis testatio est resurrectionis mortuorum.* The universal pattern of recurrence bears witness to the resurrection of the dead.

Norman O. Brown:
Love's Body

"The rains shall be commencing shortly, gentlemen and lady," the taxi driver said, speeding along the narrow highway to Zanzibar Town. He had been chattering steadily, wholly unafraid of his passengers. He must not know what we are, Sybille decided. "Perhaps in a week or two they begin. These shall be the long rains. The short rains come in the last of November and December."

"Yes, I know," Sybille said.

"Ah, you have been to Zanzibar before?"

"In a sense," she replied. In a sense she had been to Zanzibar many times, and how calmly she was taking it, now that the true Zanzibar was beginning to superimpose itself on the template in her mind, on that dream-Zanzibar she had carried about so long! She took everything calmly now: nothing excited her, nothing aroused her. In her former life the delay at the airport would have driven her into a fury: a ten-minute flight, and then to be trapped on the runway twice as long! But she had remained tranquil throughout it all, sitting

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almost immobile, listening vaguely to what Zacharias was saying and occasionally replying as if sending messages from another planet. And now Zanzibar, so placidly accepted. In the old days she had felt a sort of paradoxical amazement whenever some landmark familiar from childhood geography lessons or the movies or travel posters — the Grand Canyon, the Manhattan skyline, Taos Pueblo — turned out in reality to look exactly as she imagined it would; but now here was Zanzibar, unfolding predictably and unsurprisingly before her, and she observed it with a camera's cool eye, unmoved, unresponsive.

The soft, steamy air was heavy with a burden of perfumes, not only the expected pungent scent of cloves but also creamier fragrances which perhaps were those of hibiscus, frangipani, jacaranda, bougainvillaea, penetrating the cab's open window like probing tendrils. The imminence of the long rains was a tangible pressure, a presence, a heaviness in the atmosphere: at any moment a curtain might be drawn aside and the torrents would start. The highway was lined by two shaggy green walls of palms broken by tin-roofed shacks; behind the palms were mysterious dark groves, dense and alien. Along the edge of the road was the usual tropical array of obstacles: chickens, goats, naked children, old women with shrunken, toothless faces, all wandering about untroubled by the taxi's encroachment on their right of way. On through the rolling flatlands the cab sped, out onto the peninsula on which Zanzibar Town sits. The temperature seemed to be rising perceptibly minute by minute; a fist of humid heat was clamping tight over the island. "Here is the waterfront, gentleman and lady," the driver said. His voice was an intrusive hoarse purr, patronizing, disturbing. The sand was glaringly white, the water a dazzling glassy blue; a couple of dhows moved sleepily across the mouth of the harbor, their lateen sails bellying slightly as the gentle sea breeze caught them. "On this side, please —" An enormous white wooden building, four stories high, a wedding cake of long verandas and cast-iron railings, topped by a vast cupola. Sybille, recognizing it, anticipated the driver's spiel, hearing it like a subliminal pre-echo: "Beit al-Ajaib, the House of Wonders, former government house. Here the sultan was often make great banquets; here the famous of all Africa came homaging. No longer in use. Next door the old Sultan's Palace, now Palace of People. You wish to go in House of Wonders? Is open, we stop, I take you now."

"Another time," Sybille said faintly. "We'll be here awhile."

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"You not here just a day like most?"

"No, a week or more. I've come to study the history of your island. I'll surely visit the Beit al-Ajaib. But not today."

"Not today, no. Very well, you call me, I take you anywhere. I am Ibuni." He gave her a gallant toothy grin over his shoulder and swung the cab inland with a ferocious lurch, into the labyrinth of winding streets and narrow alleys that was Stonetown, the ancient Arab quarter.

All was silent here. The massive white stone buildings presented blank faces to the streets. The windows, mere slits, were shuttered. Most doors — the famous paneled doors of Stonetown, richly carved, studded with brass, cunningly inlaid, each door an ornate Islamic masterpiece — were closed and seemed to be locked. The shops looked shabby, and the small display windows were speckled with dust. Most of the signs were so faded that Sybille could barely make them out:

PREMCHAND'S EMPORIUM
MONJI'S CURIOS
ABDULLAH'S BROTHER-
HOOD STORE
MOTILAL'S BAZAAR

The Arabs were long since gone from Zanzibar. So were most of the Indians, though they were said to be creeping back. Occasionally, as it pursued its intricate course through the maze of Stonetown, the taxi passed elongated black limousines, probably of Russian or Chinese make, chauffeur-driven, occupied by dignified self-contained dark-skinned men in white robes. Legislators, so she supposed them to be, en route to meetings of state. There were no other vehicles in sight, and no pedestrians except for a few women, robed entirely in black, hurrying on solitary errands. Stonetown had none of the vitality of the countryside; it was a place of ghosts, she thought, a fitting place for vacationing deads. She glanced at Zacharias, who nodded and smiled, a quick, quirky smile that acknowledged her perception and told her that he too had had it. Communication was swift among the deads, and the obvious rarely needed voicing.

The route to the hotel seemed extraordinarily involuted, and the driver halted frequently in front of shops, saying hopefully, "You want brass chests, copper pots, silver curios, gold chains from China?" Though Sybille gently declined his suggestions, he continued to point out bazaars and emporiums, offering earnest recommendations of quality and moderate price, and gradually she realized, getting her

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bearings in the town, that they had passed certain corners more than once. Of course: the driver must be in the pay of shopkeepers who hired him to lure tourists. "Please take us to our hotel," Sybille said, and when he persisted in his huckstering — "Best ivory here, best lace" — she said it more firmly, but she kept her temper. Jorge would have been pleased by her transformation, she thought; he had all too often been the immediate victim of her fiery impatience. She did not know the specific cause of the change. Some metabolic side effect of the rekindling process, maybe, or maybe her two years of communion with Guidefather at the Cold Town, or was it, perhaps, nothing more than the new knowledge that all of time was hers, that to let oneself feel hurried now was absurd?

"Your hotel is this," Ibuni said at last.

It was an old Arab mansion — high arches, innumerable balconies, musty air, electric fans turning sluggishly in the dark hallways. Sybille and Zacharias were given a sprawling suite on the third floor, overlooking a courtyard lush with palms, vermilion nandi, kapok trees, poinsettia, and agapanthus. Mortimer, Gracchus, and Nerita had long since arrived in the other cab and were one floor below. "I'll have a bath," Sybille told Zacharias, "Will you be in the bar?"

"Very likely. Or strolling in the garden."

He went out. Sybille quickly shed her travel-sweaty clothes. The bathroom was a Byzantine marvel, elaborate swirls of colored tile, an immense yellow tub standing high on bronze eagle-claw-and-globe legs. Lukewarm water dribbled in slowly when she turned the tap. She smiled at her reflection in the tall oval mirror. There had been a mirror somewhat like it at the rekindling house. On the morning after her awakening, five or six deads had come into her room to celebrate with her her successful transition across the interface, and they had had that big mirror with them; delicately, with great ceremoniousness, they had drawn the coverlet down to show herself to her in it, naked, slender, narrow-waisted, high-breasted, the beauty of her body unchanged, marred neither by dying nor by rekindling, indeed enhanced by it, so that she had become more youthful-looking and even radiant in her passage across that terrible gulf.

—You're a very beautiful woman.

That was Pablo. She would learn all the names later.

—I feel such a flood of relief. I was afraid I'd wake up and find myself a shriveled ruin.

—That could not have happened, Pablo said.

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—And never will happen, said a young woman. Nerita, she was.

—But deads do age, don't they?

—Oh, yes, we age, just as the warms do. But not *just* as.

—More slowly?

—Very much more slowly. And differently. All our biological processes operate more slowly, except the functions of the brain, which tend to be quicker than they were in life.

—Quicker?

—You'll see.

—It all sounds ideal.

—We are extremely fortunate. Life has been kind to us. Our situation is, yes, ideal. We are the new aristocracy.

—The new aristocracy—

Sybille slipped slowly into the tub, leaning back against the cool porcelain, wriggling a little, letting the tepid water slide up as far as her throat. She closed her eyes and drifted peacefully. All of Zanzibar was waiting for her. *Streets I never thought I should visit.* Let Zanzibar wait. Let Zanzibar wait. *Words I never thought to speak. When I left my body on a distant shore.* Time for everything, everything in its due time.

—*You're a very beautiful woman,* Pablo had told her, not meaning to flatter.

Yes. She had wanted to explain to them, that first morning, that she didn't really care all that much about the appearance of her body, that her real priorities lay elsewhere, were "higher," but there hadn't been any need to tell them that. They understood. They understood everything. Besides, she *did* care about her body. Being beautiful was less important to her than it was to those women for whom physical beauty was their only natural advantage, but her appearance mattered to her: her body pleased her and she knew it was pleasing to others, it gave her access to people, it was a means of making connections, and she had always been grateful for that. In her other existence her delight in her body had been flawed by the awareness of the inevitability of its slow, steady decay, the certainty of the loss of that accidental power that beauty gave her, but now she had been granted exemption from that: she would change with time, but she would not have to feel, as warms must feel, that she was gradually falling apart. Her re-kindled body would not betray her by turning ugly. No.

—*We are the new aristocracy*—

After her bath she stood a few minutes by the open window, naked to the humid breeze. Sounds came to her: distant bells, the bright chatter of tropical birds, the voices of children singing in a language she could not identify. Zanzibar!

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Sultans and spices, Livingstone and Stanley, Tippu Tib the slaver, Sir Richard Burton spending a night in this very hotel room, perhaps. There was a dryness in her throat, a throbbing in her chest: a little excitement coming alive in her after all. She felt anticipation, even eagerness. All Zanzibar lay before her. Very well. Get moving, Sybille, put some clothes on, let's have lunch, a look at the town.

She took a light blouse and shorts from her suitcase. Just then Zacharias returned to the room, and she said, not looking up, "Kent, do you think it's all right for me to wear these shorts here? They're —" A glance at his face and her voice trailed off. "What's wrong?"

"I've just been talking to your husband."

"Here's *here?*"

"He came up to me in the lobby. Knew my name. 'You're Zacharias,' he said, with a Bogarty little edge to his voice, like a deceived movie husband confronting the Other Man. 'Where is she? I have to see her.'"

"Oh, no, Kent."

"I asked him what he wanted with you. 'I'm her husband,' he said, and I told him, 'Maybe you were her husband once,' and then —"

"I can't imagine Jorge talking tough. He's such a *gentle* man, Kent! How did he look?"

"Schizoid," Zacharias said. "Glassy eyes, muscles bunching in his jaws, signs of terrific pressure all over him. He knows he's not supposed to do things like this, doesn't he?"

"Jorge knows exactly how he's supposed to behave. Oh, Kent, what a stupid mess! Where is he now?"

"Still downstairs. Nerita and Laurence are talking to him. You don't want to see him, do you?"

"Of course not."

"Write him a note to that effect, and I'll take it down to him. Tell him to clear off."

Sybille shook her head. "I don't want to hurt him."

"Hurt him? He's followed you halfway around the world like a lovesick boy, he's tried to violate your privacy, he's disrupted an important trip, he's refused to abide by the conventions that govern the relationships of warms and deads, and you —"

"He loves me, Kent."

"He loved you. All right, I concede that. But the person he loved doesn't exist any more. He has to be made to realize that."

Sybille closed her eyes. "I don't want to hurt him. I don't want you to hurt him either."

"I won't hurt him. Are you going to see him?"

"No," she said. She grunted in annoyance and threw her shorts

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and blouse into a chair. There was a fierce pounding at her temples, a sensation of being challenged, of being threatened, that she had not felt since that awful day at the Newark mounds. She strode to the window and looked out, half expecting to see Jorge arguing with Nerita and Laurence in the courtyard. But there was no one down there except a houseboy who looked up as if her bare breasts were beacons and gave her a broad dazzling smile. Sybille turned her back to him and said dully, "Go back down. Tell him that it's impossible for me to see him. Use that word. Not that I *won't* see him, not that I *don't want to* see him, not that it isn't *right* for me to see him, just that it's impossible. And then phone the airport. I want to go back to Dar on the evening plane."

"But we've only just arrived!"

"No matter. We'll come back some other time. Jorge is very persistent; he won't accept anything but a brutal rebuff, and I can't do that to him. So we'll leave."

Klein had never seen deads at close range before. Cautiously, uneasily, he stole quick intense looks at Kent Zacharias as they sat side by side on rattan chairs among the potted palms in the lobby of the hotel. Jijibhoi had told him that it hardly showed, that you perceived it more subliminally than by any outward manifestation, and that was true; there was a certain look about the eyes, of course, the famous fixity of the deads, and there was something oddly pallid about Zacharias' skin *beneath* the florid complexion, but if Klein had not known what Zacharias was, he might not have guessed it. He tried to imagine this man, this red-haired, red-faced dead archaeologist, this digger of dirt mounds, in bed with Sybille. Doing with her whatever it was that the deads did in their couplings. Even Jijibhoi wasn't sure. Something with hands, with eyes, with whispers and smiles, not at all genital — so Jijibhoi believed. *This is Sybille's lover I'm talking to. This is Sybille's lover.* How strange that it bothered him so. She had had affairs when she was living, so had he, so had everyone, it was the way of life. But he felt threatened, overwhelmed, defeated, by this walking corpse of a lover.

Klein said, "Impossible?"

"That was the word she used."

"Can't I have ten minutes with her?"

"Impossible."

"Would she let me see her for a few moments, at least? I'd just like to find out how she looks."

"Don't you find it humiliating, doing all this scratching around just for a glimpse of her?"

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"Yes."

"And you still want it?"

"Yes."

Zacharias sighed. "There's nothing I can do for you. I'm sorry."

"Perhaps Sybille is tired from having done so much traveling. Do you think she might be in a more receptive mood tomorrow?"

"Maybe," Zacharias said. "Why don't you come back then?"

"You've been very kind."

"*De nada.*"

"Can I buy you a drink?"

"Thanks, no," Zacharias said. "I don't indulge any more. Not since —" He smiled.

Klein could smell whiskey on Zacharias' breath. All right, though. All right. He would go away. A driver waiting outside the hotel grounds poked his head out of his cab window and said hopefully, "Tour of the island, gentleman? See the clove plantations, see the athlete stadium?"

"I've seen them already," Klein said. He shrugged, "Take me to the beach."

He spent the afternoon watching turquoise wavelets lapping pink sand. The next morning he returned to Sybille's hotel, but they were gone, all five of them, gone on last night's flight to Dar, said the apologetic desk clerk. Klein asked if he could make a telephone call, and the clerk showed him an ancient instrument in an alcove near the bar. He phoned Barwani. "What's going on?" he demanded. "You told me they'd be staying at least a week!"

"Oh, sir, things change," Barwani said softly.

4.

> What portends? What will the future bring? I do not know, I have no presentiment. When a spider hurls itself down from some fixed point, consistently with its nature, it always sees before it only an empty space wherein it can find no foothold however much it sprawls. And so it is with me: always before me an empty space; what drives me forward is a consistency which lies behind me. This life is topsy-turvy and terrible, not to be endured.
> Soren Kierkegaard: *Either/Or*

Jijibhoi said, "In the entire question of death who is to say what is right, dear friend? When I was a boy in Bombay, it was not unusual for our Hindu neighbors to practice the rite of suttee, that is, the burning of the widow of her husband's funeral pyre, and by what presumption may we call them barbarians? Of course"—his dark eyes flashed mischievously — "we *did* call them barbarians, though never when they might hear us. Will you have more curry?"

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Klein repressed a sigh. He was getting full, and the curry was fiery stuff, of an incandescence far beyond his usual level of tolerance; but Jijibhoi's hospitality, unobtrusively insistent, had a certain hieratic quality about it that made Klein feel like a blasphemer whenever he refused anything in his home. He smiled and nodded, and Jijibhoi, rising, spooned a mound of rice into Klein's plate, buried it under curried lamb, bedecked it with chutneys and sambals. Silently, unbidden, Jijibhoi's wife went to the kitchen and returned with a cold bottle of Heinekens. She gave Klein a shy grin as she set it down before him. They worked well together, these two Parsees, his hosts.

They were an elegant couple — striking, even. Jijibhoi was a tall, erect man with a forceful aquiline nose, dark Levantine skin, jet-black hair, a formidable mustache. His hands and feet were extraordinarily small; his manner was polite and reserved; he moved with a quickness of action bordering on nervousness. Klein guessed that he was in his early forties, though he suspected his estimate could easily be off by ten years in either direction. His wife — strangely, Klein had never been told her name — was younger than her husband, nearly as tall, fair of complexion — a light olive tone — and voluptuous of figure. She dressed invariably in flowing silken saris; Jijibhoi affected Western business dress, suits and ties in styles twenty years out of date. Klein had never seen either of them bareheaded: she wore a kerchief of white linen, he a brocaded skullcap that might lead people to mistake him for an Oriental Jew. They were childless and self-sufficient, forming a closed dyad, a perfect unit, two segments of the same entity, conjoined and indivisible, as Klein and Sybille once had been. Their harmonious interplay of thought and gesture made them a trifle disconcerting, even intimidating, to others. As Klein and Sybille once had been.

Klein said, "Among your people —"

"Oh, very different, very different, quite unique. You know of our funeral custom?"

"Exposure of the dead, isn't it?"

Jijibhoi's wife giggled. "A very ancient recycling scheme!"

"The Towers of Silence," Jijibhoi said. He went to the dining room's vast window and stood with his back to Klein, staring out at the dazzling lights of Los Angeles. The Jijibhoi's house, all redwood and glass, perched precariously on stilts near the crest of Benedict Canyon, just below Mulholland: the view took in everything from Hollywood to Santa Monica. "There are five of

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them in Bombay," said Jijibhoi, "on Malabar Hill, a rocky ridge overlooking the Arabian Sea. They are centuries old, each one circular, several hundred feet in circumference, surrounded by a stone wall twenty or thirty feet high. When a Parsee dies — do you know of this?"

"Not as much as I'd like to know."

"When a Parsee dies, he is carried to the Towers on an iron bier by professional corpse bearers; the mourners follow in procession, two by two, joined hand to hand by holding a white handkerchief between them. A beautiful scene, dear Jorge. There is a doorway in the stone wall through which the corpse bearers pass, carrying their burden. No one else may enter the Tower. Within is a circular platform paved with large stone slabs and divided into three rows of shallow, open receptacles. The outer row is used for the bodies of males, the next for those of females, the innermost one for children. The dead one is given a resting place; vultures rise from the lofty palms in the gardens adjoining the Towers; within an hour or two, only bones remain. Later, the bare, sun-dried skeleton is cast into a pit at the center of the Tower. Rich and poor crumble together there into dust."

"And all Parsees are — ah — buried in this way?"

"Oh, no, no, by no means," Jijibhoi said heartily. "All ancient traditions are in disrepair nowadays, do you not know? Our younger people advocate cremation or even conventional interment. Still, many of us continue to see the beauty of our way."

"—beauty—"?

Jijibhoi's wife said in a quiet voice, "To bury the dead in the ground, in a moist tropical land where diseases are highly contagious, seems not sanitary to us. And to burn a body is to waste its substance. But to give the bodies of the dead to the efficient hungry birds — quickly, cleanly, without fuss — is to us a way of celebrating the economy of nature. To have one's bones mingle in the pit with the bones of the entire community is, to us, the ultimate democracy."

"And the vultures spread no contagions themselves, feeding as they do on the bodies of —"

"Never," said Jijibhoi firmly. "Nor do they contract our ills."

"And I gather that you both intend to have your bodies returned to Bombay when you —" Aghast, Klein paused, shook his head, coughed in embarrassment, forced a weak smile. "You see what this radioactive curry of yours has done to my manners? Forgive me. Here I sit, a guest at your dinner table, quizzing you about your funeral plans!"

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Jijibhoi chuckled. "Death is not frightening to us, dear friend. It is — one hardly needs say it, does one? — it is a natural event. For a time we are here, and then we go. When our time ends, yes, she and I will give ourselves to the Towers of Silence."

His wife added sharply, "Better there than the Cold Towns! Much better!"

Klein had never observed such vehemence in her before.

Jijibhoi swung back from the window and glared at her. Klein had never seen that before either. It seemed as if the fragile web of elaborate courtesy that he and these two had been spinning all evening was suddenly unraveling, and that even the bonds between Jijibhoi and his wife were undergoing strain. Agitated now, fluttery, Jijibhoi began to collect the empty dishes, and after a long awkward moment said, "She did not mean to give offense."

"Why should I be offended?"

"A person you love chose to go to the Cold Towns. You might think there was implied criticism of her in my wife's expression of distaste for —"

Klein shrugged. "She's entitled to her feelings about rekindling. I wonder, though —"

He halted, uneasy, fearing to probe too deeply.

"Yes?"

"It was irrelevant."

"Please," Jijibhoi said. "We are old friends."

"I was wondering," said Klein slowly, "if it doesn't make things hard for you, spending all your time among deads, studying them, mastering their ways, devoting your whole career to them, when your wife evidently despises the Cold Towns and everything that goes on in them. If the theme of your work repels her, you must not be able to share it with her."

"Oh," Jijibhoi said, tension visibly going from him, "if it comes to that, I have even less liking for the entire rekindling phenomenon than she."

"You do?" This was a side of Jijibhoi that Klein had never suspected. "It repels you? Then why did you choose to make such an intensive survey of it?"

Jijibhoi looked genuinely amazed. "What? Are you saying one must have personal allegiance to the subject of one's field of scholarship?" He laughed. "You are of Jewish birth, I think, and yet your doctoral thesis was concerned, was it not, with the early phases of the Third Reich?"

Klein winced. "Touché!"

"I find the subculture of the deads irresistible, as a sociologist," Jijibhoi went on. "To have such a radical new aspect of human existence erupt during one's career

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is an incredible gift. There is no more fertile field for me to investigate. Yet I have no wish, none at all, ever to deliver myself up for rekindling. For me, for my wife, it will be the Towers of Silence, the hot sun, the obliging vultures — and finish, the end, no more, terminus."

"I had no idea you felt this way. I suppose if I'd known more about Parsee theology, I might have realized —"

"You misunderstand. Our objections are not theological. It is that we share a wish, an idiosyncratic whim, not to continue beyond the allotted time. But also I have serious reservations about the impact of rekindling on our society. I feel a profound distress at the presence among us of these deads; I feel a purely private fear of these people and the culture they are creating; I feel even an abhorrence for —" Jijibhoi cut himself short. "Your pardon. That was perhaps too strong a word. You see how complex my attitudes are toward this subject, my mixture of fascination and repulsion? I exist in constant tension between those poles. But why do I tell you all this, which if it does not disturb you must surely bore you? Let us hear about your journey to Zanzibar."

"What can I say? I went, I waited a couple of weeks for her to show up, I wasn't able to get near her at all, and I came home. All the way to Africa, and I never even had a glimpse of her."

"What a frustration, dear Jorge!"

"She stayed in her hotel room. They wouldn't let me go upstairs to her."

"They?"

"Her entourage," Klein said. "She was traveling with four other deads, a woman and three men. Sharing her room with the archaeologist, Zacharias. He was the one who shielded her from me, and did it very cleverly, too. He acts as though he owns her. Perhaps he does. What can you tell me, Framji? Do the deads marry? Is Zacharias her new husband?"

"It is very doubtful. The terms 'wife' and 'husband' are not in use among the deads. They form relationships, yes, but pair-bonding seems to be uncommon among them, possibly altogether unknown. Instead they tend to create supportive pseudofamilial groupings of three or four or even more individuals, who —"

"Do you mean that all four of her companions in Zanzibar are her lovers?"

Jijibhoi gestured eloquently. "Who can say? If you mean in a physical sense, I doubt it, but one can never be sure. Zacharias seems to be her special companion, at any rate. Several of the others may be

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part of her pseudofamily also, or all, or none. I have reason to think that at certain times every dead may claim a familial relationship to all others of his kind. Who can say? We perceive these people, as they say, through a glass, darkly."

"I don't see Sybille even that well. I don't even know what she looks like now."

"She has lost none of her beauty."

"So you've told me before. But I want to see her myself. You can't really comprehend, Framji, how much I want to see her. The pain I feel, not able —"

"Would you like to see her right now?"

Klein shook in a convulsion of amazement. "What? Is she —"

"Hiding in the next room? No, no, nothing like that. But I do have a small surprise for you. Come into the library." Smiling expansively, Jijibhoi led the way from the dining room to the small study adjoining it, a room densely packed from floor to ceiling with books in an astonishing range of languages — not merely English, French, and German, but also Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati, Farsi, the tongues of Jijibhoi's polyglot upbringing among the tiny Parsee colony of Bombay, a community in which no language once cherished was ever discarded. Pushing aside a stack of dog-eared professional journals, he drew forth a glistening picture-cube, activated its inner light with a touch of his thumb, and handed it to Klein.

The sharp, dazzling holographic image showed three figures in a broad grassy plain that seemed to have no limits and was without trees, boulders, or other visual interruptions, an endlessly unrolling green carpet under a blank death-blue sky. Zacharias stood at the left, his face averted from the camera; he was looking down, tinkering with the action of an enormous rifle. At the far right stood a stocky, powerful-looking dark-haired man whose pale, harsh-featured face seemed all beard and nostrils. Klein recognized him: Anthony Gracchus, one of the deads who had accompanied Sybille to Zanzibar. Sybille stood beside him, clad in khaki slacks and a crisp white blouse. Gracchus' arm was extended; evidently he had just pointed out a target to her, and she was intently aiming a gun nearly as big as Zacharias'.

Klein shifted the cube about, studying her face from various angles, and the sight of her made his fingers grow thick and clumsy, his eyelids to quiver. Jijibhoi had spoken truly: she had lost none of her beauty. Yet she was not at all the Sybille he had known. When he had last seen her, lying in her casket, she had seemed to be a

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flawless marble image of herself, and she had that same surreal statuary appearance now. Her face was an expressionless mask, calm, remote, aloof; her eyes were glossy mysteries; her lips registered a faint, enigmatic, barely perceptible smile. It frightened him to behold her this way, so alien, so unfamiliar. Perhaps it was the intensity of her concentration that gave her that forbidding marmoreal look, for she seemed to be pouring her entire being into the task of taking aim. By tilting the cube more extremely, Klein was able to see what she was aiming at: a strange awkward bird moving through the grass at the lower left, a bird larger than a turkey, round as a sack, with ash-gray plumage, a whitish breast and tail, yellow-white wings, and short, comical yellow legs. Its head was immense and its black bill ended in a great snubbed hook. The creature seemed solemn, rather dignified, and faintly absurd; it showed no awareness that its doom was upon it. How odd that Sybille should be about to kill it, she who had always detested the taking of life: Sybille the huntress now, Sybille the lunar goddess, Sybille-Diana!

Shaken, Klein looked up and said, "Where was this taken? On that safari in Tanzania, I suppose."

"Yes. In February. This man is the guide, the white hunter."

"I saw him in Zanzibar. Gracchus, his name is. He was one of the deads traveling with Sybille."

"He operates a hunting preserve not far from Kilimanjaro," Jijibhoi said, "that is set aside exclusively for the use of the deads. One of the more bizarre manifestations of their subculture, actually. They hunt only those animals which —"

Klein said impatiently, "How did you get this picture?"

"It was taken by Nerita Tracy, one of your wife's companions."

"I met her in Zanzibar too. But how —"

"A friend of hers is an acquaintance of mine, one of my informants, in fact, a valuable connection in my researches. Some months ago I asked him if he could obtain something like this for me. I did not tell him, of course, that I meant it for you." Jijibhoi looked close. "You seem troubled, dear friend."

Klein nodded. He shut his eyes as though to protect them from the glaring surfaces of Sybille's photograph. Eventually he said in a flat, toneless voice, "I have to get to see her."

"Perhaps it would be better for you if you would abandon —"

"*No.*"

"Is there no way I can convince you that it is dangerous for you to pursue your fantasy of —"

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"No," Klein said. "Don't even try. It's necessary for me to reach her. Necessary."

"How will you accomplish this, then?"

Klein said mechanically, "By going to Zion Cold Town."

"You have already done that. They would not admit you."

"This time they will. They don't turn away deads."

The Parsee's eyes widened. "You will surrender your own life? Is this your plan? What are you saying, Jorge?"

Klein, laughing, said, "That isn't what I meant at all."

"I am bewildered."

"I intend to infiltrate. I'll disguise myself as one of them. I'll slip into the Cold Town the way an infidel slips into Mecca." He seized Jijibhoi's wrist. "Can you help me? Coach me in their ways, teach me their jargon?"

"They'll find you out instantly."

"Maybe not. Maybe I'll get to Sybille before they do."

"This is insanity," Jijibhoi said quietly.

"Nevertheless. You have the knowledge. Will you help me?"

Gently Jijibhoi withdrew his arm from Klein's grasp. He crossed the room and busied himself with an untidy bookshelf for some moments, fussily arranging and rearranging. At length he said, "There is little I can do for you myself. My knowledge is broad but not deep, not deep enough. But if you insist on going through with this, Jorge, I can introduce you to someone who may be able to assist you. He is one of my informants, a dead, a man who has rejected the authority of the Guidefathers, a person who is *of* the deads but not *with* them. Possibly he can instruct you in what you would need to know."

"Call him," Klein said.

"I must warn you he is unpredictable, turbulent, perhaps even treacherous. Ordinary human values are without meaning to him in his present state."

"Call him."

"If only I could discourage you from —"

"Call him."

5.

Quarreling brings trouble. These days lions roar a great deal. Joy follows grief. It is not good to beat children much. You had better go away now and go home. It is impossible to work today. You should go to school every day. It is not advisable to follow this path, there is water in the way. Never mind, I shall be able to pass. We had better go back quickly. These lamps use a lot of oil. There are no mosquitoes in Nairobi. There are no lions here. There are people here, looking for eggs. Is there water

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in the well? No, there is none.
If there are only three people,
work will be impossible today.
D.V. Perrott:
Teach Yourself Swahili

Gracchus signals furiously to the porters and bellows, *"Shika njia hii hii!"* Three turn, two keep trudging along. *"Ninyi nyote!"* he calls. *"Fanga kama hivi!"* He shakes his head, spits, flicks sweat from his forehead. He adds, speaking in a lower voice and in English, taking care that they will not hear him, "Do as I say, you malevolent black bastards, or you'll be deader than I am before sunset!"

Sybille laughs nervously. "Do you always talk to them like that?"

"I try to be easy on them. But what good does it do, what good does any of it do? Come on, let's keep up with them."

It is less than an hour after dawn, but already the sun is very hot, here in the flat dry country between Kilimanjaro and Serengetti. Gracchus is leading the party northward across the high grass, following the spoor of what he thinks is a quagga, but breaking a trail in the high grass is hard work, and the porters keep veering away toward a ravine that offers the tempting shade of a thicket of thorn trees, and he constantly has to harass them in order to hold them to the route he wants. Sybille has noticed that Gracchus shouts fiercely to his blacks, as if they were no more than recalcitrant beasts, and speaks of them behind their backs with a rough contempt, but it all seems done for show, all part of his white-hunter role: she has also noticed, at times when she was not supposed to notice, that privately Gracchus is in fact gentle, tender, even loving among the porters, teasing them — she supposes — with affectionate Swahili banter and playful mock-punches. The porters are role players too: they behave in the traditional manner of their profession, alternately deferential and patronizing to the clients, alternately posing as well-knowing repositories of the lore of the bush and as simple, guileless savages fit only for carrying burdens. But the clients they serve are not quite like the sportsmen of Hemingway's time, since they are deads, and secretly the porters are terrified of the strange beings whom they serve. Sybille has seen them muttering prayers and fondling amulets whenever they accidentally touch one of the deads, and she has occasionally detected an unguarded glance conveying unalloyed fear, possibly revulsion. Gracchus is no friend of theirs, however jolly he may get with them: they appear to regard him as some sort of

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monstrous sorcerer and the clients as fiends made manifest.

Sweating, saying little, the hunters move in single file, first the porters with the guns and supplies, then Gracchus, Zacharias, Sybille, Nerita constantly clicking her camera, and Mortimer. Patches of white cloud drift slowly across the immense arch of the sky. The grass is lush and thick, for the short rains were unusually heavy in December. Small animals scurry through it, visibly only in quick flashes, squirrels and jackals and guinea fowl. Now and then larger creatures can be seen: three haughty ostriches, a pair of snuffling hyenas, a band of Thomson gazelles flowing like a tawny river across the plain. Yesterday Sybille spied two wart hogs, some giraffes, and a serval, an elegant big-eared wildcat that slithered along like a miniature cheetah. None of these beasts may be hunted, but only those special ones that the operators of the preserve have introduced for the special needs of their clients; anything considered native African wildlife, which is to say anything that was living here before the deads leased this tract from the Masai, is protected by government decree. The Masai themselves are allowed to do some lion hunting, since this is their reservation, but there are so few Masai left that they can do little harm. Yesterday, after the wart hogs and before the giraffes, Sybille saw her first Masai, five lean, handsome, long-bodied men, naked under skimpy red robes, drifting silently through the bush, pausing frequently to stand thoughtfully on one leg, propped against their spears. At close range they were less handsome — toothless, fly-specked, herniated. They offered to sell their spears and their beaded collars for a few shillings, but the safarigoers had already stocked up on Masai artifacts in Nairobi's curio shops, at astonishingly higher prices.

All through the morning they stalk the quagga, Gracchus pointing out hoofprints here, fresh dung there. It is Zacharias who has asked to shoot a quagga. "How can you tell we're not following a zebra?" he asks peevishly.

Gracchus winks. "Trust me. We'll find zebras up ahead too. But you'll get your quagga."

Ngiri, the head porter, turns and grins. "*Piga quagga m'uzuri, bwana,*" he says to Zacharias, and winks also, and then — Sybille sees it plainly — his jovial confident smile fades as though he has had the courage to sustain it only for an instant, and a veil of dread covers his dark glossy face.

"What did he say?" Zacharias asks.

"That you'll shoot a fine quagga," Gracchus replies.

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Quaggas. The last wild one was killed about 1870, leaving only three in the world, all females, in European zoos. The Boers had hunted them to the edge of extinction in order to feed their tender meat to Hottentot slaves and to make from their striped hides sacks for Boer grain, leather *veldschoen* for Boer feet. The quagga of the London zoo died in 1872, that in Berlin in 1875 the Amsterdam quagga in 1883, and none was seen alive again until the artificial revival of the species through breedback selection and genetic manipulation in 1990, when this hunting preserve was opened.

It is nearly noon, now, and not a shot has been fired all morning. The animals have begun heading for cover; they will not emerge until the shadows lengthen. Time to halt, pitch camp, break out the beer and sandwiches, tell tall tales of harrowing adventures with maddened buffaloes and edgy elephants. But not quite yet. The marchers come over a low hill and see, in the long sloping hollow beyond, a flock of ostriches and several hundred grazing zebras. As the humans appear, the ostriches begin slowly and warily to move off, but the zebras, altogether unafraid, continue to graze. Ngiri points and says, *"Piga quagga, bwana."*

"Just a bunch of zebras," Zacharias says.

Gracchus shakes his head. "No. Listen. You hear the sound?"

At first no perceives anything unusual. But then, yes, Sybille hears it: a shrill barking neigh, very strange, a sound out of lost time, the cry of some beast she has never known. It is a song of the dead. Nerita hears it too, and Mortimer, and finally Zacharias. Gracchus nods toward the far side of the hollow. There, among the zebras, are half a dozen animals that might almost be zebras, but are not — unfinished zebras, striped only on their heads and foreparts; the rest of their bodies are yellowish-brown, their legs are white, their manes are dark brown with pale stripes. Their coats sparkle like mica in the sunshine. Now and again they lift their heads, emit that weird percussive whistling snort, and bend to the grass again. Quaggas. Strays out of the past, relicts, rekindled specters. Gracchus signals and the party fans out along the peak of the hill. Ngiri hands Zacharias his colossal gun. Zacharias kneels, sights.

"No hurry," Gracchus murmurs. "We have all afternoon."

"Do I seem to be hurrying?" Zacharias asks. The zebras now block the little group of quaggas from his view, almost as if by design. He must not shoot a zebra, of course, or there will be trouble with the rangers. Minutes go by.

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Then the screen of zebras abruptly parts, and Zacharias squeezes his trigger. There is a vast explosion; zebras bolt in ten directions, so that the eye is bombarded with dizzying stroboscopic waves of black and white; when the convulsive confusion passes, one of the quaggas is lying on its side, alone in the field, having made the transition across the interface. Sybille regards it calmly. Death once dismayed her, death of any kind, but no longer.

"*Piga m'uzuri!*" the porters cry exultantly.

"*Kufa,*" Gracchus says. "Dead. A neat shot. You have your trophy."

Ngiri is quick with the skinning knife. That night, camping below Kilimanjaro's broad flank, they dine on roast quagga, deads and porters alike. The meat is juicy, robust, faintly tangy.

Late the following afternoon, as they pass through cooler stream-broken country thick with tall, scrubby gray-green vase-shaped trees, they come upon a monstrosity, a shaggy shambling thing twelve or fifteen feet high, standing upright on ponderous hind legs and balancing itself on an incredibly thick, heavy tail. It leans against a tree, pulling at its top branches with long forelimbs that are tipped with ferocious claws like a row of sickles; it munches voraciously on leaves and twigs. Briefly it notices them, and looks around, studying them with small stupid yellow eyes; then it returns to its meal.

"A rarity," Gracchus says. "I know hunters who have been all over this park without even running into one. Have you ever seen anything so ugly?"

"What is it?" Sybille asks.

"*Megatherium.* Giant ground sloth. South American, really, but we weren't fussy about geography when we were stocking this place. We have only four of them, and it costs God knows how many thousands of dollars to shoot one. Nobody's signed up for a ground sloth yet. I doubt anyone will."

Sybille wonders where the beast might be vulnerable to a bullet: surely not in its dim peanut-sized brain. She wonders, too, what sort of sportsman would find pleasure in killing such a thing. For a while they watch as the sluggish monster tears the tree apart. Then they move on.

Gracchus shows them another prodigy at sundown: a pale dome, like some huge melon, nestling in a mound of dense grass beside a stream. "Ostrich egg?" Mortimer guesses.

"Close. Very close. It's a moa egg. World's biggest bird. From New Zealand, extinct since about the eighteenth century."

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Nerita crouches and lightly taps the egg. "What an omelet we could make!"

"There's enough there to feed seventy-five of us," Gracchus says. "Two gallons of fluid, easy. But of course we mustn't meddle with it. Natural increase is very important in keeping this park stocked."

"And where's mamma moa?" Sybille asks. "Should she have abandoned the egg?"

"Moas aren't very bright," Gracchus answers. "That's one good reason why they became extinct. She must have wandered off to find some dinner. And —"

"Good God," Zacharias blurts.

The moa has returned, emerging suddenly from a thicket. She stands like a feathered mountain above them, limned by the deep blue of twilight: an ostrich, more or less, but a magnified ostrich, an ultimate ostrich, a bird a dozen feet high, with a heavy rounded body and a great thick hose of a neck and taloned legs as sturdy as saplings. Surely this is Sinbad's *rukh*, that can fly off with elephants in its grasp! The bird peers at them, sadly contemplating the band of small beings clustered about her egg; she reaches for one of the rifles, But Gracchus checks his hand, for the moa is merely rearing back to protest. It utters a deep mournful mooing sound and does not move. "Just back slowly away," Gracchus tells them. "It won't attack. But keep away from the feet; one kick can kill you."

"I was going to apply for a license on a moa," Mortimer says.

"Killing them's a bore," Gracchus tells him. "They just stand there and let you shoot. You're better off with what you signed up for."

What Mortimer has signed up for is an aurochs, the vanished wild ox of the European forests, known to Caesar, known to Pliny, hunted by the hero Siegfried, altogether exterminated by the year 1627. The plains of East Africa are not a comfortable environment for the aurochs, and the herd that has been conjured by the genetic necromancers keeps to itself in the wooded highlands, several days' journey from the haunts of quaggas and ground sloths. In this dark grove the hunters came upon troops of chattering baboons and solitary big-eared elephants and, in a place of broken sunlight and shadow, a splendid antelope, a bull bongo with a fine curving pair of horns. Gracchus leads them onward, deeper in. He seems tense: there is peril here. The porters slip through the forest like black wraiths, spreading out in arching crab-claw patterns, communicating with one another and with Gracchus by whistling. Everyone keeps weapons ready in here. Sybille half expects

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to see leopards draped on overhanging branches, cobras slithering through the undergrowth. But she feels no fear.

They approach a clearing.

"Aurochs," Gracchus says.

A dozen of them are cropping the shrubbery: big short-haired long-horned cattle, muscular and alert. Picking up the scent of the intruders, they lift their heavy heads, sniff, glare. Gracchus and Ngiri confer with eyebrows. Nodding, Gracchus mutters to Mortimer, "Too many of them. Wait for them to thin off." Mortimer smiles. He looks a little nervous. The aurochs has a reputation for attacking without warning. Four, five, six of the beasts slip away, and the others withdraw to the edge of the clearing, as if to plan strategy; but one big bull, sour-eyed and grim, stands his ground, glowering. Gracchus rolls on the balls of his feet. His burly body seems, to Sybille, a study in mobility, in preparedness.

"Now," he says.

In the same moment the bull aurochs charges, moving with extraordinary swiftness, head lowered, horns extended like spears. Mortimer fires. The bullet strikes with a loud whonking sound, crashing into the shoulder of the aurochs, a perfect shot, but the animal does not fall, and Mortimer shoots again, less gracefully ripping into the belly, and then Gracchus and Ngiri are firing also, not at Mortimer's aurochs but over the heads of the others, to drive them away, and the risky tactic works, for the other animals go stampeding off into the woods. The one Mortimer has shot continues toward him, staggering now, losing momentum, and falls practically at his feet, rolling over, knifing the forest floor with its hooves.

"*Kufa,*" Ngiri says. "*Piga nyati m'uzuri, bwana.*"

Mortimer grins. "*Piga.*"

Gracchus salutes him. "More exciting than moa," he says.

"And these are mine," says Nerita three hours later, indicating a tree at the outer rim of the forest. Several hundred large pigeons nest in its boughs, so many of them that the tree seems to be sprouting birds rather than leaves. The females are plain — light brown above, gray below — but the males are flamboyant, with rich, glossy blue plumage on their wings and backs, breasts of a wine-red chestnut color, iridescent spots of bronze and green on their necks, and weird, vivid eyes of a bright, fiery orange. Gracchus says, "Right. You've found your passenger pigeons."

"Where's the thrill in shooting pigeons out of a tree?" Mortimer asks.

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Nerita gives him a withering look. "Where's the thrill in gunning down a charging bull?" She signals to Ngiri, who fires a shot into the air. The startled pigeons burst from their perches and fly in low circles. In the old days, a century and a half ago in the forests of North America, no one troubled to shoot passenger pigeons on the wing: the pigeons were food, not sport, and it was simpler to blast them as they sat, for that way a single hunter might kill thousands of birds in one day. Thus it took only fifty years to reduce the passenger pigeon population from uncountable sky-blackening billions to zero. Nerita is more sporting. This is a test of her skill, after all. She aims her shotgun, shoots, pumps, shoots, pumps. Stunned birds drop to the ground. She and her gun are a single entity, sharing one purpose. In moments it is all over. The porters retrieve the fallen birds and snap their necks. Nerita has the dozen pigeons her license allows: a pair to mount, the rest for tonight's dinner. The survivors have returned to their tree and stare placidly, unreproachfully, at the hunters. "They breed so damned fast," Gracchus mutters. "If we aren't careful, they'll be getting out of the preserve and taking over all of Africa."

Sybille laughs. "Don't worry. We'll cope. We wiped them out once and we can do it again, if we have to."

Sybille's prey is a dodo. In Dar, when they were applying for their licenses, the others mocked her choice: a flat flightless bird, unable to run or fight, so feeble of wit that it fears nothing. She ignored them. She wants a dodo because to her it is the essence of extinction, the prototype of all that is dead and vanished. That there is no sport in shooting foolish dodoes means little to Sybille. Hunting itself is meaningless for her.

Through this vast park she wanders as in a dream. She sees ground sloths, great auks, quaggas, moas, heath hens, Javan rhinos, giant armadillos, and many other rarities. The place is an abode of ghosts. The ingenuities of the genetic craftsmen are limitless; someday, perhaps, the preserve will offer trilobites, tyrannosaurs, mastodons, saber-toothed cats, baluchitheria, even — why not? — packs of Australopithecines, tribes of Neanderthals. For the amusement of the deads, whose games tend to be somber. Sybille wonders whether it can really be considered killing, this slaughter of laboratory-spawned novelties. Are these animals real or artificial? Living things, or cleverly animated constructs? Real, she decides. Living.

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They eat, they metabolize, they reproduce. They must seem real to themselves, and so they are real — realer, maybe, than dead human beings who walk again in their own castoff bodies.

"Shotgun," Sybille says to the closest porter.

There is the bird, ugly, waddling through the tall grass. Sybille accepts a weapon and sights along its barrel. "Wait," Nerita says. "I'd like to get a picture of this." She moves slantwise around the group, taking exaggerated care not to frighten the dodo, but the dodo does not seem to be aware of any of them. Like an emissary from the realm of darkness, carrying good news of death to those creatures not yet extinct, it plods diligently across their path. "Fine," Nerita says. "Anthony, point at the dodo, will you, as if you've just noticed it? Kent, I'd like you to look down at your gun, study its bolt or something. Fine. And Sybille, just hold that pose — aiming — yes —"

Nerita takes the picture.

Calmly Sybille pulls the trigger.

"Kazi imekwisha," Gracchus says. "The work is finished."

6.

> Although to be driven back upon oneself is an uneasy affair at best, rather like trying to cross a border with borrowed credentials, it seems to be now the one condition necessary to the beginnings of real self-respect. Most of our platitudes notwithstanding, self-deception remains the most difficult deception. The tricks that work on others count for nothing in that very well-lit back alley where one keeps assignations with oneself: no winning smiles will do here, no prettily drawn lists of good intentions.
>
> Joan Didion: *On Self-Respect*

"You better believe what Jeej is trying to tell you," Dolorosa said. "Ten minutes inside the Cold Town, they'll have your number. Five minutes."

Jijibhoi's man was small, rumpled-looking, forty or fifty years old, with untidy long dark hair and wide-set smoldering eyes. His skin was sallow and his face was gaunt. Such other deads as Klein had seen at close range had about them an air of unearthly serenity, but not this one: Dolorosa was tense, fidgety, a knuckle-cracker, a lip-gnawer. Yet somehow there could be no doubt he was a dead, as much a dead as Zacharias, as Gracchus, as Mortimer.

"They'll have my what?" Klein asked.

"Your number. Your number. They'll know you aren't a dead,

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because it can't be faked. Jesus, don't you even speak English? Jorge, that's a foreign name. I should have known. Where are you from?"

"Argentina, as a matter of fact, but I was brought to California when I was a small boy. In 1955. Look, if they catch me, they catch me. I just want to get in there and spend half an hour talking with my wife."

"Mister, you don't have any wife any more."

"With Sybille," Klein said, exasperated. "To talk with Sybille, my — my former wife."

"All right. I'll get you inside."

"What will it cost?"

"Never mind that," Dolorosa said. "I owe Jeej here a few favors. More than a few. So I'll get you the drug —"

"Drug?"

"The drug the Treasury agents use when they infiltrate the Cold Towns. It narrows the pupils, contracts the capillaries, gives you that good old zombie look. The agents always get caught and thrown out, and so will you, but at least you'll go in there feeling that you've got a convincing disguise. Little oily capsule, one every morning before breakfast."

Klein looked at Jijibhoi. "Why do Treasury agents infiltrate the Cold Towns?"

"For the same reasons they infiltrate anywhere else," Jijibhoi said. "To spy. They are trying to compile dossiers on the financial dealings of the deads, you see, and until proper life-defining legislation is approved by Congress there is no precise way of compelling a person who is deemed legally dead to divulge —"

Dolorosa said, "Next, the background. I can get you a card of residence from Albany Cold Town in New York. You died last December, okay, and they re-kindled you back East because — let's see —"

"I could have been attending the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in New York," Klein suggested. "That's what I do, you understand, professor of contemporary history at UCLA. Because of the Christmas holiday my body couldn't be shipped back to California, no room on any flight, and so they took me to Albany. How does that sound?"

Dolorosa smiled. "You really enjoy making up lies, professor, don't you? I can dig that quality in you. Okay, Albany Cold Town, and this is your first trip out of there, your drying-off trip — that's what it's called, drying-off — you come out of the Cold Town like a new butterfly just out of its cocoon, all soft and damp, and you're on your own in a strange place. Now, there's

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a lot of stuff you'll need to know about how to behave, little mannerisms, social graces, that kind of crap, and I'll work on that with you tomorrow and Wednesday and Friday, three sessions; that ought to be enough. Meanwhile let me give you the basics. There are only three things you really have to remember while you're inside:

"One. Never ask a direct question.

"Two. Never lean on anybody's arm. You know what I mean?

"Three. Keep in mind that to a dead the whole universe is plastic, nothing's real, nothing matters a hell of a lot, it's all only a joke. Only a joke, friend, only a joke."

Early in April he flew to Salt Lake City, rented a car, and drove out past Moab into the high plateau rimmed by red-rock mountains where the deads had built Zion Cold Town. This was Klein's second visit to the necropolis. The other had been in the late summer of '91, a hot, parched season when the sun filled half the sky and even the gnarled junipers looked dazed from thirst; but now it was a frosty afternoon, with faint pale light streaming out of the wintry western hills and occasional gusts of light snow whirling through the iron-blue air. Jijibhoi's route instructions pulsed from the memo screen on his dashboard. Fourteen miles from town, yes; narrow paved lane turns off highway, yes; discreet little sign announcing PRIVATE ROAD, NO ADMITTANCE, yes; a second sign a thousand yards in, ZION COLD TOWN, MEMBERS ONLY, yes; and then just beyond that the barrier of green light across the road, the scanner system, the roadblocks sliding like scythes out of the underground installations, a voice on an invisible loudspeaker saying, "If you have a permit to enter Zion Cold Town, please place it under your left-hand windshield wiper."

That other time he had had no permit, and he had gone no farther than this, though at least he had managed a little colloquy with the unseen gatekeeper out of which he had squeezed the information that Sybille was indeed living in that particular Cold Town. This time he affixed Dolorosa's forged card of residence to his windshield and waited tensely, and in thirty seconds the roadblocks slid from sight. He drove on, along a winding road that followed the natural contours of a dense forest of scrubby conifers, and came at last to a brick wall that curved away into the trees as though it encircled the entire town. Probably it did. Klein had an overpowering sense of the Cold Town as an hermetic city, ponderous and sealed as old Egypt.

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There was a metal gate in the brick wall; green electronic eyes surveyed him, signaled their approval, and the wall rolled open.

He drove slowly toward the center of town, passing through a zone of what he supposed were utility buildings — storage depots, a power substation, the municipal waterworks, whatever, a bunch of grim windowless one-story cinder-block affairs — and then into the residential district, which was not much lovelier. The streets were laid out on a rectangular grid; the buildings were squat, dreary, impersonal, homogeneous. There was practically no automobile traffic, and in a dozen blocks he saw no more than ten pedestrians, who did not even glance at him. So this was the environment in which the deads chose to spend their second lives. But why such deliberate bleakness? "You will never understand us," Dolorosa had warned. Dolorosa was right. Jijibhoi had told him that Cold Towns were something less than charming, but Klein had not been prepared for this. There was a glacial quailty about the place, as though it were wholly entombed in a block of clear ice: silence, sterility, a mortuary calm. Cold Town, yes, aptly named. Architecturally, the town looked like the worst of all possible cheap-and-sleazy tract developments, but the psychic texture it projected was even more depressing, more like that of one of those ghastly retirement communities, one of the innumerable Leisure Worlds or Sun Manors, those childless, joyless retreats where colonies of that other kind of living dead collected to await the last trumpet. Klein shivered.

At last, another few minutes deeper into the town, a sign of activity, if not exactly of life: a shopping center, flat-topped brown stucco buildings around a U-shaped courtyard, a steady flow of shoppers moving about. All right. His first test was about to commence. He parked his car near the mouth of the U and strolled uneasily inward. He felt as if his forehead were a beacon, flashing glowing betrayals at rhythmic intervals:

FRAUD INTRUDER
INTERLOPER SPY

Go ahead, he thought, seize me, seize the impostor, get it over with, throw me out, string me up, crucify me. But no one seemed to pick up the signals. He was altogether ignored. Out of courtesy? Or just contempt? He stole what he hoped were covert glances at the shoppers, half expecting to run across Sybille right away. They all looked like sleepwalkers, moving in glazed

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silence about their errands. No smiles, no chatter: the icy aloofness of these self-contained people heightened the familiar suburban atmosphere of the shopping center into surrealist intensity, Norman Rockwell with an overlay of Dali or De Chirico. The shopping center looked like all other shopping centers: clothing stores, a bank, a record shop, snack bars, a florist, a TV-stereo outlet, a theater, a five-and-dime. One difference, though, became apparent as Klein wandered from shop to shop: the whole place was automated. There were no clerks anywhere, only the ubiquitous data screens, and no doubt a battery of hidden scanners to discourage shoplifters. (Or did the impulse toward petty theft perish with the body's first death?) The customers selected all the merchandise themselves, checked it out via data screens, touched their thumbs to charge plates to debit their accounts. Of course. No one was going to waste his precious rekindled existence standing behind a counter to sell tennis shoes or cotton candy. Nor were the dwellers in the Cold Towns likely to dilute their isolation by hiring a labor force of imported warms. Somebody here had to do a little work, obviously — how did the merchandise get into the stores? — but, in general, Klein realized, what could not be done here by machines would not be done at all.

For ten minutes he prowled the center. Just when he was beginning to think he must be entirely invisible to these people, a short, broad-shouldered man, bald but with oddly youthful features, paused in front of him and said, "I am Pablo. I welcome you to Zion Cold Town." This unexpected puncturing of the silence so startled Klein that he had to fight to retain appropriate deadlike imperturbability. Pablo smiled warmly and touched both his hands to Klein's in friendly greeting, but his eyes were frigid, hostile, remote, a terrifying contradiction. "I've been sent to bring you to the lodging place. Come, your car."

Other than to give directions, Pablo spoke only three times during the five-minute drive. "Here is the rekindling house," he said. A five-story building, as uninviting as a hospital, with walls of dark bronze and windows as black as onyx. "This is Guidefather's house," Pablo said a moment later. A modest brick building, like a rectory, at the edge of a small park. And, finally: "This is where you will stay. Enjoy your visit." Abruptly he got out of the car and walked rapidly away.

This was the house of strangers, the hotel for visiting deads, a long, low cinderblock structure, func-

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tional and unglamorous, one of the least seductive buildings in this city of stark, disagreeable buildings. However else it might be with the deads, they clearly had no craving for fancy architecture. A voice out of a data screen in the Spartan lobby assigned him to a room: a white-walled box, square, high of ceiling. He had his own toilet, his own data screen, a narrow bed, a chest of drawers, a modest closet, a small window that gave him a view of a neighboring building just as drab as this. Nothing had been said about rental; perhaps he was a guest of the city. Nothing had been said about anything. It seemed that he had been accepted. So much for Jijibhoi's gloomy assurance that he would instantly be found out, so much for Dolorosa's insistence that they would have his number in ten minutes or less. He had been in Zion Cold Town for half an hour. Did they have his number?

"Eating isn't important among us," Dolorosa had said.

"But you do eat?"

"Of course we eat. It just isn't *important.*"

It was important to Klein, though. Not *haute cuisine,* necessarily, but some sort of food, preferably three times a day. He was getting hungry now. Ring for room service? There were no servants in this city. He turned to the data screen. Dolorosa's first rule: *Never ask a direct question.* Surely that didn't apply to the data screen, only to his fellow deads. He didn't have to observe the niceties of etiquette when talking to a computer. Still, the voice behind the screen might not be that of a computer after all, and so he tried to employ the oblique, elliptical conversational style that Dolorosa said the deads favored among themselves:

"Dinner?"

"Commissary."

"Where?"

"Central Four," said the screen.

Central Four? All right. He would find the way. He changed into fresh clothing and went down the long vinyl-floored hallway to the lobby. Night had come; streetlamps were glowing; under cloak of darkness the city's ugliness was no longer so obtrusive, and there was even a kind of controlled beauty about the brutal regularity of its streets.

The streets were unmarked, though, and deserted. Klein walked at random for ten minutes, hoping to meet someone heading for the Central Four commissary. But when he did come upon someone, a tall and regal woman well advanced in years, he found himself incapable of approaching her. (*Never ask a direct question. Never lean on anybody's arm.*) He walked

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alongside her, in silence and at a distance, until she turned suddenly to enter a house. For ten minutes more he wandered alone again. This is ridiculous, he thought: dead or warm, I'm a stranger in town, I should be entitled to a little assistance. Maybe Dolorosa was just trying to complicate things. On the next corner, when Klein caught sight of a man hunched away from the wind, lighting a cigarette, he went boldly over to him.

"Excuse me, but —"

The other looked up. "Klein?" he said. "Yes. Of course. Well, so you've made the crossing too!"

He was one of Sybille's Zanzibar companions, Klein realized. The quick-eyed, sharp-edged one — Mortimer. A member of her pseudofamilial grouping, whatever that might be. Klein stared sullenly at him. This had to be the moment when his imposture would be exposed, for only some six weeks had passed since he had argued with Mortimer in the gardens of Sybille's Zanzibar hotel, not nearly enough time for someone to have died and been rekindled and gone through his drying-off. But a moment passed and Mortimer said nothing. At length Klein said, "I just got here. Pablo showed me to the house of strangers and now I'm looking for the commissary."

"Central Four? I'm going there myself. How lucky for you." No sign of suspicion in Mortimer's face. Perhaps an elusive smile revealed his awareness that Klein could not be what he claimed to be. *Keep in mind that to a dead the whole universe is plastic, it's all only a joke.* "I'm waiting for Nerita," Mortimer said. "We can eat together."

Klein said heavily, "I was rekindled in Albany Cold Town. I've just emerged."

"How nice," Mortimer said.

Nerita Tracy stepped out of a building just beyond the corner — a slim athletic-looking woman, about forty, with short reddish-brown hair. As she swept toward them Mortimer said, "Here's Klein, who we met in Zanzibar. Just rekindled, out of Albany."

"Sybille will be amused."

"Is she in town?" Klein blurted.

Mortimer and Nerita exchanged sly glances. Klein felt abashed. *Never ask a direct question.* Damn Dolorosa!

Nerita said, "You'll see her before long. Shall we go to dinner?"

The commissary was less austere than Klein had expected: actually quite an inviting restaurant, elaborately constructed on five or six levels divided by lustrous dark hangings into small, secluded dining areas. It had the warm, rich look of a tropical resort. But the

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food, which came automat-style out of revolving dispensers, was prefabricated and cheerless — another jarring contradiction. *Only a joke, friend, only a joke.* In any case he was less hungry than he had imagined at the hotel. He sat with Mortimer and Nerita, picking at his meal, while their conversation flowed past him at several times the speed of thought. They spoke in fragments and ellipses, in periphrastics and aposiopeses, in a style abundant in chiasmus, metonymy, meiosis, oxymoron, and zeugma; their dazzling rhetorical techniques left him baffled and uncomfortable, which beyond much doubt was their intention. Now and again they would dart from a thicket of indirection to skewer him with a quick corroborative stab: Isn't that so? they would say, and he would smile and nod, nod and smile, saying, yes, yes, absolutely. Did they know he was a fake, and were they merely playing with him, or had they, somehow, impossibly, accepted him as one of them? So subtle was their style that he could not tell. A very new member of the society of the rekindled, he told himself, would be nearly as much at sea as a warm in deadface.

Then Nerita said — no verbal games, this time — "You still miss her terribly, don't you?"

"I do. Some things evidently never perish."

"Everything perishes," Mortimer said. "The dodo, the aurochs, the Holy Roman Empire, the T'ang Dynasty, the walls of Byzantium, the language of Mohenjo-Daro."

"But not the Great Pyramid, the Yangtze, the coelacanth, or the skullcap of *Pithecanthropus*," Klein countered. "Some things persist and endure. And some can be regenerated. Lost languages have been deciphered. I believe the dodo and the aurochs are hunted in a certain African park in this very era."

"Replicas," Mortimer said.

"Convincing replicas. Simulations as good as the original."

"Is that what you want?" Nerita asked.

"I want what's possible to have."

"A convincing replica of lost love?"

"I might be willing to settle for five minutes of conversation with her."

"You'll have it. Not tonight. See? There she is. But don't bother her now." Nerita nodded across the gulf in the center of the restaurant; on the far side, three levels up from where they sat, Sybille and Kent Zacharias had appeared. They stood for a brief while at the edge of their dining alcove, staring blandly and emotionlessly into the restaurant's central wall. Klein felt a muscle jerking uncontrollably in

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his cheek, a damning revelation of undeadlike uncoolness, and pressed his hand over it, so that it twanged and throbbed against his palm. She was like a goddess up there, manifesting herself in her sanctum to her worshippers, a pale shimmering figure, more beautiful even than she had become to him through the anguished enhancements of memory, and it seemed impossible to him that that being had ever been his wife, that he had known her when her eyes were puffy and reddened from a night of study, that he had looked down at her face as they made love and had seen her lips pull back in that spasm of ecstasy that is so close to a grimace of pain, that he had known her crotchety and unkind in her illness, short-tempered and impatient in health, a person of flaws and weaknesses, or odors and blemishes, in short a human being, this goddess, this unreal rekindled creature, this object of his quest, this Sybille. Serenely she turned, serenely she vanished into her cloaked alcove. "She knows you're here," Nerita told him. "You'll see her. Perhaps tomorrow." Then Mortimer said something maddeningly oblique, and Nerita replied with the same off-center mystification, and Klein once more was plunged into the river of their easy dancing wordplay, down into it, down and down and down, and as he struggled to keep from drowning, as he fought to comprehend their interchanges, he never once looked toward the place where Sybille sat, not even once, and congratulated himself on having accomplished that much at least in his masquerade.

That night, lying alone in his room at the house of strangers, he wonders what he will say to Sybille when they finally meet, and what she will say to him. Will he dare bluntly to ask her to describe to him the quality of her new existence? That is all that he wants from her, really, that knowledge, that opening of an aperture into her transfigured self; that is as much as he hopes to get from her, knowing as he does that there is scarcely a chance of regaining her, but will he dare to ask, will he dare even that? Of course his asking such things will reveal to her he is still a warm, too dense and gross of perception to comprehend the life of a dead; but he is certain she will sense that anyway, instantly. What will he say, what will he say? He plays out an imagined script of their conversation in the theater of his mind:

—Tell me what it's like, Sybille, to be the way you are now.

—Like swimming under a sheet of glass.

—I don't follow.

—Everything is quiet where I am, Jorge. There's a peace that

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passeth all understanding. I used to feel sometimes that I was caught up in a great storm, that I was being buffeted by every breeze, that my life was being consumed by agitations and frenzies, but now, now, I'm at the eye of the storm, at the place where everything is always calm. I observe rather than let myself be acted upon.

—But isn't there a loss of feeling that way? Don't you feel that you're wrapped in an insulating layer? Like swimming under glass, you say — that conveys being insulated, being cut off, being almost numb.

—I suppose you might think so. The way it is, is that one no longer is affected by the unnecessary.

—It sounds to me like a limited existence.

—Less limited than the grave, Jorge.

—I never understood why you wanted rekindling. You were such a world devourer, Sybille; you lived with such intensity, such passion. To settle for the kind of existence you have now, to be only half alive —

—Don't be a fool, Jorge. To be half alive is better than to be rotting in the ground. I was so young. There was so much else still to see and do.

—But to see it and do it half alive?

—Those were your words, not mine. I'm not alive at all. I'm neither less nor more than the person you knew. I'm another kind of being altogether. Neither less nor more, only different.

—Are all your perceptions different?

—Very much so. My perspective is broader. Little things stand revealed as little things.

—Give me an example, Sybille.

—I'd rather not. How could I make anything clear to you? Die and be with us, and you'll understand.

—You know I'm not dead?

—Oh, Jorge, how funny you are!

—How nice that I can still amuse you.

—You look so hurt, so tragic. I could almost feel sorry for you. Come, ask me anything.

—Could you leave your companions and live in the world again?

—I've never considered that.

—Could you?

—I suppose I could. But why should I? This is my world now.

—This ghetto.

—Is that how it seems to you?

—You lock yourselves into a closed society of your peers, a tight subculture. Your own jargon, your own wall of etiquette and idiosyncrasy. Designed, I think, mainly to keep the outsiders off balance, to keep them feeling like outsiders.

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It's a defensive thing. The hippies, the blacks, the gays, the deads — same mechanism, same process.

—The Jews, too. Don't forget the Jews.

—All right, Sybille, the Jews. With their little tribal jokes, their special holidays, their own mysterious language, yes, a good case in point.

—So I've joined a new tribe. What's wrong with that?

—Did you need to be part of a tribe?

—What did I have before? The tribe of Californians? The tribe of academics?

—The tribe of Jorge and Sybille Klein.

—Too narrow. Anyway, I've been expelled from that tribe. I needed to join another one.

—Expelled?

—By death. After that, there's no going back.

—You could go back. Anytime.

—Oh, no, no, no, Jorge, I can't, I can't, I'm not Sybille Klein any more, I never will be again. How can I explain it to you? There's no way. Death brings on changes. Die and see, Jorge. Die and see.

Nerita said, "She's waiting for you in the lounge."

It was a big, coldly furnished room at the far end of the other wing of the house of strangers. Sybille stood by a window through which pale, chilly morning light was streaming. Mortimer was with her, and also Kent Zacharias. The two men favored Klein with mysterious oblique smiles — courteous or derisive, he could not tell which. "Do you like our town?" Zacharias asked. "Have you been seeing the sights?" Klein chose not to reply. He acknowledged the question with a faint nod and turned to Sybille. Strangely, he felt altogether calm at this moment of attaining a years-old desire: he felt nothing at all in her presence, no panic, no yearning, no dismay, no nostalgia, nothing, nothing. As though he were truly a dead. He knew it was the tranquillity of utter terror.

"We'll leave you two alone," Zacharias said. "You must have so much to tell each other." He went out, with Nerita and Mortimer. Klein's eyes met Sybille's and lingered there. She was looking at him cooly, in a kind of impersonal appraisal. That damnable smile of hers, Klein thought: dying turns them all into Mona Lisas.

She said, "Do you plan to stay here long?"

"Probably not. A few days, maybe a week." He moistened his lips. "How have you been, Sybille? How has it been going?"

"It's all been about as I expected."

What do you mean by that?

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Can you give me some details? Are you at all disappointed? Have there been any surprises? What has it been like for you, Sybille? Oh, Jesus—

—Never ask a direct question—

He said, "I wish you had let me visit with you in Zanzibar."

"That wasn't possible. Let's not talk about it now." She dismissed the episode with a casual wave. After a moment she said, "Would you like to hear a fascinating story I've uncovered about the early days of Omani influence in Zanzibar?"

The impersonality of the question startled him. How could she display such absolute lack of curiosity about his presence in Zion Cold Town, his claim to be a dead, his reasons for wanting to see her? How could she plunge so quickly, so coldly, into a discussion of archaic political events in Zanzibar?

"I suppose so," he said weakly.

"It's a sort of Arabian Nights story, really. It's the story of how Ahmad the Sly overthrew Abdullah ibn Muhammad Alawi."

The names were strange to him. He had indeed taken some small part in her historical researches, but it was years since he had worked with her, and everything had drifted about in his mind, leaving a jumbled residue of Ahmads and Hasans and Abdullahs. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't recall who they were."

Unperturbed, Sybille said, "Certainly you remember that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the chief power in the Indian Ocean was the Arab state of Oman, ruled from Muscat on the Persian Gulf. Under the Busaidi dynasty, founded in 1744 by Ahmad ibn Said al-Busaidi, the Omani extended their power to East Africa. The logical capital for their African empire was the port of Mombasa, but they were unable to evict a rival dynasty reigning there, so the Busaidi looked toward nearby Zanzibar — a cosmopolitan island of mixed Arab, Indian, and African population. Zanzibar's strategic placement on the coast and its spacious and well-protected harbor made it an ideal base for the East African slave trade that the Busaidi of Oman intended to dominate."

"It comes back to me now, I think."

"Very well. The founder of the Omani sultanate of Zanzibar was Ahmad ibn Majid the Sly, who came to the throne of Oman in 1811 — do you remember? — upon the death of his uncle Abd-er-Rahman al-Busaidi."

"The names sound familiar," Klein said doubtfully.

"Seven years later," Sybille continued, "seeking to conquer Zanzibar without the use of force,

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Ahmad the Sly shaved his beard and mustache and visited the island disguised as a soothsayer, wearing yellow robes and a costly emerald in his turban. At that time most of Zanzibar was governed by a native ruler of mixed Arab and African blood, Abdullah ibn Muhammad Alawi, whose hereditary title was Mwenyi Mkuu. The Mwenyi Mkuu's subjects were mainly Africans, members of a tribe called the Hadimu. Sultan Ahmad, arriving in Zanzibar Town, gave a demonstration of his soothsaying skills on the waterfront and attracted so much attention that he speedily gained an audience at the court of the Mwenyi Mkuu. Ahmad predicted a glowing future for Abdullah, declaring that a powerful prince famed throughout the world would come to Zanzibar, make the Mwenyi Mkuu his high lieutenant, and would confirm him and his descendants as lords of Zanzibar forever.

"'How do you know these things?' asked the Mwenyi Mkuu.

"'There is a potion I drink,' Sultan Ahmad replied, 'that enables me to see what is to come. Do you wish to taste of it?'

"'Most surely I do,' Abdullah said, and Ahmad thereupon gave him a drug that sent him into rapturous transports and showed him visions of paradise. Looking down from his place near the footstool of Allah, the Mwenyi Mkuu saw a rich and happy Zanzibar governed by his children's children's children. For hours he wantered in fantasies of almighty power.

"Ahmad then departed, and let his beard and mustache grow again, and returned to Zanzibar ten weeks later in his full regalia as Sultan of Oman, at the head of an imposing and powerful armada. He went at once to the court of the Mwenyi Mkuu and proposed, just as the soothsayer had prophesied, that Oman and Zanzibar enter into a treaty of alliance under which Oman would assume responsibility for much of Zanzibar's external relations — including the slave trade — while guaranteeing the authority of the Mwenyi Mkuu over domestic affairs. In return for his partial abdication of authority, the Mwenyi Mkuu would receive financial compensation from Oman. Remembering the vision the soothsayer had revealed to him, Abdullah at once signed the treaty, thereby legitimizing what was, in effect, the Omani conquest of Zanzibar. A great feast was held to celebrate the treaty, and, as a mark of honor, the Mwenyi Mkuu offered Sultan Ahmad a rare drug used locally, known as *borqash,* or 'the flower of truth.' Ahmad only pretended to put the pipe to his lips, for he loathed all mind-

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altering drugs, but Abdullah, as the flower of truth possessed him, looked at Ahmad and recognized the outlines of the soothsayer's face behind the sultan's new beard. Realizing that he had been deceived, the Mwenyi Mkuu thrust his dagger, the tip of which was poisoned, deep into the sultan's side and fled the banquet hall, taking up residence on the neighboring island of Pemba. Ahmad ibn Majid survived, but the poison consumed his vital organs, and the remaining ten years of his life were spent in constant agony. As for the Mwenyi Mkuu, the sultan's men hunted him down and put him to death along with ninety members of his family, and native rule in Zanzibar was therewith extinguished."

Sybille paused. "Is that not a gaudy and wonderful story?" she asked at last.

"Fascinating," Klein said. "Where did you find it?"

"Unpublished memoirs of Claude Richburn of the East India Company. Buried deep in the London archives. Strange that no historian ever came upon it before, isn't it? The standard texts simply say that Ahmad used his navy to bully Abdullah into signing the treaty and then had the Mwenyi Mkuu assassinated at the first convenient moment."

"Very strange," Klein agreed. But he had not come here to listen to romantic tales of visionary potions and royal treacheries. He groped for some way to bring the conversation to a more personal level. Fragments of his imaginary dialogue with Sybille floated through his mind. *Everything is quiet where I am, Jorge. There's a peace that passeth all understanding. Like swimming under a sheet of glass. The way it is, is that one no longer is affected by the unnecessary. Little things stand revealed as little things. Die and be with us, and you'll understand.* Yes. Perhaps. But did she really believe any of that? He had put all the words in her mouth; everything he had imagined her to say was his own construct, worthless as a key to the true Sybille. Where would he find the key, though?

She gave him no chance. "I will be going back to Zanzibar soon," she said. "There's much I want to learn about this incident from the people in the back country — old legends about the last days of the Mwenyi Mkuu, perhaps variants on the basic story —"

"May I accompany you?"

"Don't you have your own research to resume, Jorge?" she asked, and did not wait for an answer. She walked briskly toward the door of the lounge and went out, and he was alone.

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7.

I mean what they and their hired psychiatrists call "delusional systems." Needless to say, "delusions" are always officially defined. We don't have to worry about questions of real or unreal. They only talk out of expediency. It's the *system* that matters. How the data arrange themselves inside it. Some are consistent, others fall apart.

Thomas Pynchon:
Gravity's Rainbow

Once more the deads, this time only three of them, coming over on the morning flight from Dar. Three were better than five, Daud Mahmoud Barwani supposed, but three were still more than a sufficiency. Not that those others, two months back, had caused any trouble, staying just the one day and flitting off to the mainland again, but it made him uncomfortable to think of such creatures on the same small island as himself. With all the world to choose, why did they keep coming to Zanzibar?

"The plane is here," said the flight controller.

Thirteen passengers. The health officer let the local people through the gate first — two newspapermen and four legislators coming back from the Pan-African Conference in Capetown — and then processed a party of four Japanese tourists, unsmiling owlish men festooned with cameras. And then the deads: and Barwani was surprised to discover that they were the same ones as before, the red-haired man, the brown-haired man with the beard, the black-haired woman. Did deads have so much money that they could fly from America to Zanzibar every few months? Barwani had heard a tale to the effect that each new dead, when he rose from his coffin, was presented with bars of gold equal to his own weight, and now he thought he believed it. No good will come of having such beings loose in the world, he told himself, and certainly none from letting them into Zanzibar. Yet he had no choice. "Welcome once again to the isle of cloves," he said unctuously, and smiled a bureaucratic smile, and wondered, not for the first time, what would become of Daud Mahmoud Barwani once his days on earth had reached their end.

"—Ahmad the Sly versus Abdullah Something," Klein said. "That's all she would talk about. The history of Zanzibar." He was in Jijibhoi's study. The night was warm, and a late-season rain was falling, blurring the million sparkling lights of the Los Angeles basin. "It would have been, you know, gauche to ask her any direct

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questions. Gauche. I haven't felt so gauche since I was fourteen. I was helpless among them, a foreigner, a child."

"Do you think they saw through your disguise?" Jijibhoi asked.

"I can't tell. They seemed to be toying with me, to be having sport with me, but that may just have been their general style with any newcomer. Nobody challenged me. Nobody hinted I might be an impostor. Nobody seemed to care very much about me or what I was doing there or how I had happened to become a dead. Sybille and I stood face-to-face, and I wanted to reach out to her, I wanted her to reach out to me, and there was no contact, none, none at all, it was though we had just met at some academic cocktail party and the only thing on her mind was the new nugget of obscure history she had just unearthed, and so she told me all about how Sultan Ahmad outfoxed Abdullah and Abdullah stabbed the sultan." Klein caught sight of a set of familiar books on Jijibhoi's crowded shelves — Oliver and Mathew, *History of East Africa,* books that had traveled everywhere with Sybille in the years of their marriage. He pulled forth Volume I, saying, "She claimed that the standard histories give a sketchy and innacurate description of the incident and that she's only now discovered the true story. For all I know, she was just playing a game with me, telling me a piece of established history as though it were something nobody knew till last week. Let me see — Ahmad, Ahmad, Ahmad —"

He examined the index. Five Ahmads were listed, but there was no entry for a Sultan Ahmad ibn Majid the Sly. Indeed an Ahmad ibn Majid was cited, but he was mentioned only in a footnote and appeared to be an Arab chronicler. Klein found three Abdullahs, none of them a man of Zanzibar. "Something's wrong," he murmured.

"It does not matter, dear Jorge," Jijibhoi said mildly.

"It does. Wait a minute." He prowled the listings. Under *Zanzibar, Rulers,* he found no Ahmads, no Abdullahs; he did discover a Majid ibn Said, but when he checked the reference, he found that he had reigned somewhere in the second half of the nineteenth century. Desperately Klein flipped pages, skimming, turning back, searching. Eventually he looked up and said, "It's all wrong!"

"The Oxford History of East Africa?"

"The details of Sybille's story. Look, she said this Ahmad the Sly gained the throne of Oman in 1811, and seized Zanzibar seven years later. But the book says that a certain Seyyid Said al-Busaidi

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became Sultan of Oman in 1806 and ruled for *fifty years*. He was the one, not this nonexistent Ahmad the Sly, who grabbed Zanzibar, but he did it in 1828, and the ruler he compelled to sign a treaty with him, the Mwenyi Mkuu, was named Hasan ibn Ahmad Alawi, and —" Klein shook his head. "It's an altogether different cast of characters. No stabbings, no assassinations, the dates are entirely different, the whole thing —"

Jijibhoi smiled sadly. "The deads are often mischievous."

"But why would she invent a complete fantasy and palm it off as a sensational new discovery? Sybille was the most scrupulous scholar I ever knew! She would never —"

"That was the Sybille you knew, dear friend. I keep urging you to realize that this is another person, a new person, within her body."

"A person who would lie about history?"

"A person who would tease," Jijibhoi said.

"Yes," Klein muttered. "Who would tease." *Keep in mind that to a dead the whole universe is plastic, nothing's real, nothing matters a hell of a lot.* "Who would tease a stupid, boring, annoyingly persistent ex-husband who has shown up in her Cold Town, wearing a transparent disguise and pretending to be a dead. Who would invent not only an anecdote but even its principals, as a joke, a game, a *jeu d' esprit*. Oh, God. Oh, God, how cruel she is, how foolish I was! It was her way of telling me she knew I was a phony dead. *Quid pro quo*, fraud for fraud!"

"What will you do?"

"I don't know," Klein said.

What he did, against Jijibhoi's strong advice and his own better judgment, was to get more pills from Dolorosa and return to Zion Cold Town. There would be a fitful joy, like that of probing the socket of a missing tooth, in confronting Sybille with the evidence of her fictional Ahmad, her imaginary Abdullah. Let there be no more games between us, he would say. Tell me what I need to know, Sybille, and then let me go away, but tell me only truth. All the way to Utah he rehearsed his speech, polishing and embellishing. There was no need for it, though, since this time the gate of Zion Cold Town would not open for him. The scanners scanned his forged Albany card, and the loudspeaker said, "Your credentials are invalid."

Which could have ended it. He might have returned to Los Angeles and picked up the pieces of his life. All this semester he had been on sabbatical leave, but the summer term was coming and there was work to do. He did return to Los Angeles, but only long enough to pack a somewhat larger suitcase,

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find his passport, and drive to the airport. On a sweet May evening a BOAC jet took him over the Pole to London, where, barely pausing for coffee and buns at an airport shop, he boarded another plane that carried him southeast toward Africa. More asleep than awake, he watched the dreamy landmarks drifting past: the Mediterranean, coming and going with surprising rapidity, and the tawny carpet of the Libyan Desert, and the mighty Nile, reduced to a brown thread's thickness when viewed from a height of ten miles. Suddenly Kilimanjaro, mist-wrapped, snow-bound, loomed like a giant double-headed blister to his right, far below, and he thought he could make out to his left the distant glare of the sun of the Indian Ocean. Then the big needle-nosed plane began its abrupt, swooping descent, and he found himself, soon after, stepping out into the warm humid air and dazzling sunlight of Dar es Salaam.

Too soon, too soon. He felt unready to go on to Zanzibar. A day or two of rest, perhaps: he picked a Dar hotel at random, the Agip, liking the strange sound of its name, and hired a taxi. The hotel was sleek and clean, a streamlined affair in the glossy 1960's style, much cheaper than the Kilimanjaro where he had stayed briefly on the other trip, and located in a pleasant leafy quarter of the city, near the ocean. He strolled about for a short while, discovered that he was altogether exhausted, returned to his room for a nap that stretched on for nearly five hours, and, awakening groggy, showered and dressed for dinner. The hotel's dining room was full of beefy red-faced fair-haired men, jacketless and wearing open-throated white shirts, all of whom reminded him disturbingly of Kent Zacharias; but these were warms, Britishers from their accents, engineers, he suspected, from their conversation. They were building a dam and a power plant somewhere up the coast, it seemed, or perhaps a power plant without a dam; it was hard to follow what they said. They drank a good deal of gin and spoke in hearty booming shouts. There were also a good many Japanese businessmen, of course, looking trim and restrained in dark-blue suits and narrow ties; and at the table next to Klein's were five tanned curly-haired men talking in rapid Hebrew — Israelis, surely. The only Africans in sight were waiters and bartenders. Klein ordered Mombasa oysters, steak, and a carafe of red wine, and found the food unexpectedly good, but left most of it on his plate. It was late evening in Tanzania, but for him it was ten o'clock in the

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morning, and his body was confused. He tumbled into bed, meditated vaguely on the probable presence of Sybille just a few air-minutes away in Zanzibar, and dropped into a sound sleep from which he awakened, what seemed like many hours later, to discover that it was still well before dawn.

He dawdled away the morning sightseeing in the old native quarter, hot and dusty, with unpaved streets and rows of tin shacks, and at midday returned to his hotel for a shower and lunch. Much the same national distribution in the restaurant — British, Japanese, Israeli — though the faces seemed different. He was on his second beer when Anthony Gracchus came in. The white hunter, broad-shouldered, pale, densely bearded, clad in khaki shorts, khaki shirt, seemed almost to have stepped out of the picture-cube Jijibhoi had once shown him. Instinctively Klein shrank back, turning toward the window, but too late: Gracchus had seen him. All chatter came to a halt in the restaurant as the dead man strode to Klein's table, pulled out a chair unasked, and seated himself; then, as though a motion picture projector had been halted and started again, the British engineers resumed their shouting, sounding somewhat strained now. "Small world," Gracchus said. "Crowded one, anyway. On your way to Zanzibar, are you, Klein?"

"In a day or so. Did you know I was here?"

"Of course not." Gracchus' harsh eyes twinkled slyly. "Sheer coincidence is what this is. She's there already."

"She is?"

"She and Zacharias and Mortimer. I hear you wiggled your way into Zion."

"Briefly," Klein said. "I saw Sybille. Briefly."

"Unsatisfactorily. So once again you've followed her here. Give it up, man. Give it up."

"I can't."

"*Can't!*" Gracchus scowled. "A neurotic's word, *can't*. What you mean is *won't*. A mature man can do anything he wants to that isn't a physical impossibility. Forget her. You're only annoying her, this way, interfering with her work, interfering with her —" Gracchus smiled. "With her life. She's been dead almost three years, hasn't she? Forget her. The world's full of other women. You're still young, you have money, you aren't ugly, you have professional standing —"

"Is this what you were sent here to tell me?"

"I wasn't sent here to tell you anything, friend. I'm only trying to save you from yourself. Don't go to Zanzibar. Go home and start your life again."

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"When I saw her at Zion," Klein said, "she treated me with contempt. She amused herself at my expense. I want to ask her why she did that."

"Because you're a warm and she's a dead. To her you're a clown. To all of us you're a clown. It's nothing personal, Klein. There's simply a gulf in attitudes, a gulf too wide for you to cross. You went to Zion drugged up like a Treasury man, didn't you? Pale face, bulgy eyes? You didn't fool anyone. You certainly didn't fool *her*. The game she played with you was her way of telling you that. Don't you know that?"

"I know it, yes."

"What more do you want, then? More humiliation?"

Klein shook his head wearily and stared at the tablecloth. After a moment he looked up, and his eyes met those of Gracchus, and he was astounded to realize that he trusted the hunter, that for the first time in his dealings with the deads he felt he was being met with sincerity. He said in a low voice, "We were very close, Sybille and I, and then she died, and now I'm nothing to her. I haven't been able to come to terms with that. I need her, still. I want to share my life with her, even now."

"But you can't."

"I know that. And still I can't help doing what I've been doing."

"There's only one thing you *can* share with her," Gracchus said. "That's your death. She won't descend to your level: you have to climb to hers."

"Don't be absurd."

"Who's absurd, me or you? Listen to me, Klein. I think you're a fool, I think you're a weakling, but I don't dislike you, I don't hold you to blame for your own foolishness. And so I'll help you, if you'll allow me." He reached into his breast pocket and withdrew a tiny metal tube with a safety catch at one end. "Do you know what this is?" Gracchus asked. "It's a self-defense dart, the kind all the women in New York carry. A good many deads carry them, too, because we never know when the reaction will start, when the mobs will turn against us. Only we don't use anesthetic drugs in ours. Listen, we can walk into any tavern in the native quarter and have a decent brawl going in five minutes, and in the confusion I'll put one of these darts into you, and we'll have you in Dar General Hospital fifteen minutes after that, crammed into a deep-freeze unit, and for a few thousand dollars we can ship you unthawed to California, and this time Friday night you'll be undergoing re-kindling in, say, San Diego Cold Town. And when you come out of it, you and Sybille will be on the same side of the gulf, do you see? If

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you're destined to get back together with her, ever, that's the only way. That way you have a chance. This way you have none."

"It's unthinkable," Klein said.

"Unacceptable, maybe. But not unthinkable. Nothing's unthinkable once somebody's thought it. You think it some more. Will you promise me that? Think about it before you get aboard that plane for Zanzibar. I'll be staying here tonight and tomorrow, and then I'm going out to Arusha to meet some deads coming in for the hunting, and anytime before then I'll do it for you if you say the word. Think about it. Will you think about it? Promise me that you'll think about it."

"I'll think about it," Klein said.

"Good. Good. Thank you. Now let's have lunch and change the subject. Do you like eating here?"

"One thing puzzles me. Why does this place have a clientele that's exclusively non-African? Does it dare to discriminate against blacks in a black republic?"

Gracchus laughed. "It's the blacks who discriminate, friend. This is considered a second-class hotel. All the blacks are at the Kilimanjaro or the Nyerere. Still, it's not such a bad place. I recommend the fish dishes, if you haven't tried them, and there's a decent white wine from Israel that —"

8.

O Lord, methought what pain
it was to drown!
What dreadful noise of water
in mine ears!
What sights of ugly death
within mine eyes!
Methought I saw a thousand
fearful wrecks;
A thousand men that fishes
gnawed upon;
Wedges of gold, great anchors,
heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalued
jewels,
All scatt'red in the bottom of
the sea:
Some lay in dead men's skulls;
and in the holes
Where eyes did once inhabit
there were crept,
As 'twere in scorn of eyes,
reflecting gems
that wooed the slimy bottom of
the deep,
And mocked the dead bones
that lay scatt'red by.

Shakespeare: *Richard III*

"— Israeli wine," Mick Dongan was saying. "Well, I'll try anything once, especially if there's some neat little irony attached to it. I mean, there we were in Egypt, in *Egypt,* at this fabulous dinner party in the hills at Luxor, and our host is a Saudi prince, no less, in full tribal costume right down to the sunglasses; and when they bring

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out the roast lamb, he grins devilishly and says, Of course we could always drink Mouton-Rothschild, but I do happen to have a small stock of select Israeli wines in my cellar, and because I think you are, like myself, a connoisseur of small incongruities, I've asked my steward to open a bottle or two of — Klein, do you see that girl who just came in?" It is January, 1981, early afternoon, a fine drizzle in the air. Klein is lunching with six colleagues from the history department at the Hanging Gardens atop the Westwood Plaza. The hotel is a huge ziggurat on stilts; the Hanging Gardens is a rooftop restaurant, ninety stories up, in freaky neo-Babylonian decor, all winged bulls and snorting dragons of blue and yellow tile, waiters with long curly beards and scimitars at their hips — gaudy nightclub by dark, campy faculty hangout by day. Klein looks to his left. Yes, a handsome woman, midtwenties, coolly beautiful, serious-looking, taking a seat by herself, putting a stack of books and cassettes down on the table before her. Klein does not pick up strange girls: a matter of moral policy, and also a matter of innate shyness. Dongan teases him. "Go on over, will you? She's your type, I swear. Her eyes are the right color for you, aren't they?"

Klein has been complaining, lately, that there are too many blue-eyed girls in Southern California. Blue eyes are disturbing to him, somehow, even menacing. His own eyes are brown. So are hers: dark, warm, sparkling. He thinks he has seen her occasionally in the library. Perhaps they have even exchanged brief glances. "Go on," Dongan says. "Go *on*, Jorge. Go." Klein glares at him. He will not go. How can he intrude on this woman's privacy? To force himself on her — it would almost be like rape. Dongan smiles complacently; his bland grin is a merciless prod. Klein refuses to be stampeded. But then, as he hesitates, the girl smiles too, a quick shy smile, gone so soon he is not altogether sure it happened at all, but he is sure enough, and he finds himself rising, crossing the alabaster floor, hovering awkwardly over her, searching for some inspired words with which to make contact, and no words come, but still they make contact the old-fashioned way, eye to eye, and he is stunned by the intensity of what passes between them in that first implausible moment.

"Are you waiting for someone?" he mutters, stunned.

"No." The smile again, far less tentative. "Would you like to join me?"

She is a graduate student, he discovers quickly. Just got her master's, beginning now on her

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doctorate — the nineteenth-century East African slave trade, particular emphasis on Zanzibar. "How romantic," he says. "Zanzibar! Have you been there?"

"Never. I hope to go some day. Have you?"

"Not ever. But it always interested me, ever since I was a small boy collecting stamps. It was the last country in my album."

"Not in mine," she says. "Zululand was."

She knows him by name, it turns out. She had even been thinking of enrolling in his course on Nazism and Its Offspring. "Are you South American?" she asks.

"Born there. Raised here. My grandparents escaped to Buenos Aires in '37."

"Why Argentina? I thought that was a hotbed of Nazis."

"Was. Also full of German-speaking refugees, though. All their friends went there. But it was too unstable. My parents got out in '55, just before one of the big revolutions, and came to California. What about you?"

"British family. I was born in Seattle. My father's in the consular service. He —"

A waiter looms. They order sandwiches offhandedly. Lunch seems very unimportant now. The contact still holds. He sees Conrad's *Nostromo* in her stack of books; she is halfway through it, and he has just finished it, and the coincidence amuses them. Conrad is one of her favorites, she says. One of his, too. What about Faulkner? Yes, and Mann, and Virginia Woolf, and they share even a fondness for Hermann Broch, and a dislike for Hesse. How odd. Operas? *Freischut, Hollander, Fidelio,* yes. "We have very Teutonic tastes," she observes. "We have very similar tastes," he adds. He finds himself holding her hand. "Amazingly similar," she says. Mick Dongan leers at him from the far side of the room; Klein gives him a terrible scowl. Dongan winks. "Let's get out of here," Klein says, just as she starts to say the same thing."

They talk half the night and make love until dawn. "You ought to know," he tells her solemnly over breakfast, "that I decided long ago never to get married and certainly never to have a child."

"So did I," she says. "When I was fifteen."

They were married four months later. Mick Dongan was his best man.

Gracchus said, as they left the restaurant, "You will think things over, won't you?"

"I will," Klein said. "I promised you that."

He went to his room, packed his suitcase, checked out, and took a

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cab to the airport, arriving in plenty of time for the afternoon flight to Zanzibar. The same melancholy little man was on duty as health officer when he landed, Barwani. "Sir, you have come back," Barwani said. "I thought you might. The other people have been here several days already."

"The other people?"

"When you were here last, sir, you kindly offered me a retainer in order that you might be informed when a certain person reached this island." Barwani's eyes gleamed. "That person, with two of her former companions, is here now."

Klein carefully placed a twenty-shilling note on the health officer's desk.

"At which hotel?"

Barwani's lips quirked. Evidently fell short of expectations. But Klein did not take out another banknote, and after a moment Barwani said, "As before. The Zanzibar House. And you, sir?"

"As before," Klein said. "I'll be staying at the Shirazi."

Sybille was in the garden of the hotel, going over that day's research notes, when the telephone call came from Barwani. "Don't let my papers blow away," she said to Zacharias, and went inside. When she returned, looking bothered, Zacharias said, "Is there trouble?"

She sighed. "Jorge. He's on his way to his hotel now."

"What a bore," Mortimer murmured. "I thought Gracchus might have brought him to his senses."

"Evidently not," Sybille said. "What are we going to do?"

"What would you like to do?" Zacharias asked.

She shook her head. "We can't allow this to go on, can we?"

The evening air was humid and fragrant. The long rains had come and gone, and the island was in the grip of the new season's lunatic fertility: outside the window of Klein's hotel room some vast twining vine was putting forth monstrous trumpet-shaped yellow flowers, and all about the hotel grounds everything was in blossom, everything was in a frenzy of moist young leaves. Klein's sensibility reverberated to that feeling of universal vigorous thrusting newness; he paced the room, full of energy, trying to devise some feasible stratagem. Go immediately to see Sybille? Force his way in, if necessary, with shouts and alarums, and demand to know why she had told him that fantastic tale of imaginary sultans: No. No. He would do no more confronting, no more lamenting; now that he was here, now that he was close by her, he would seek her out calmly; he would talk quietly; he would invoke

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memories of their old love; he would speak of Rilke and Woolf and Broch, of afternoons in Puerto Vallarta and nights in Santa Fe, of music heard and caresses shared; he would rekindkle not their marriage, for that was impossible, but merely the remembrance of the bond that once had existed; he would win from her some acknowledgment of what had been, and then he would soberly and quietly exorcise that bond; he and she together, they would work to free him by speaking softly of the change that had come over their lives, until, after three hours or four or five, he had brought himself with her help to an acceptance of the unacceptable. That was all. He would demand nothing, he would beg for nothing, except only that she assist him for one evening in ridding his soul of this useless destructive obsession. Even a dead, even a capricious, wayward, volatile, whimsical, wanton dead, would surely see the desirability of that and would freely give him her cooperation. Surely. And then home, and then new beginnings, too long postponed.

He made ready to go out.

There was a soft knock at the door. "Sir? Sir? You have visitors downstairs."

"Who?" Klein asked, though he knew the answer.

"A lady and two gentlemen," the bellhop replied. "The taxi has brought them from the Zanzibar House. They wait for you in the bar."

"Tell them I'll be down in a moment."

He went to the iced pitcher on the dresser, drank a glass of cold water mechanically, unthinkingly, poured himself a second, drained that too. This visit was unexpected; and why had she brought her entourage along? He had to struggle to regain that centeredness, that sense of purpose understood, which he thought he had attained before the knock. Eventually he left the room.

They were dressed crisply and impeccably this damp night. Zacharias in a tawny frock coat and pale green trousers, Mortimer in a belted white caftan trimmed with intricate brocade, Sybille in a simple lavender tunic. Their pale faces were unmarred by perspiration; they seemed perfectly composed, models of poise. No one sat near them in the bar. As Klein entered, they stood to greet him, but their smiles appeared sinister, having nothing of friendliness in them. Klein clung tight to his intended calmness. He said quietly, "It was kind of you to come. May I buy drinks for you?"

"We have ours already," Zacharias pointed out. "Let us be your hosts. What will you have?"

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"Pimms's Number Six," Klein said. He tried to match their frosty smiles. "I admire your tunic, Sybille. You all look so debonair tonight that I feel ashamed."

"You never were famous for your clothes," she said.

Zacharias returned from the counter with Klein's drink. He took it and toasted them gravely.

After a short while Klein said, "Do you think I could talk privately with you, Sybille?"

"There's nothing we have to say to one another that can't be said in front of Kent and Laurence."

"Nevertheless."

"I prefer not to, Jorge."

"As you wish." Klein peered straight into her eyes and saw nothing there, nothing, and flinched. All that he had meant to say fled his mind. Only churning fragments danced there: Rilke, Broch, Puerto Vallarta. He gulped at his drink.

Zacharias said, "We have a problem to discuss, Klein."

"Go on."

"The problem is you. You're causing great distress to Sybille. This is the second time, now, that you've followed her to Zanzibar, to the literal end of the earth, Klein, and you've made several attempts besides to enter a closed sanctuary in Utah under false pretenses, and this is interfering with Sybille's freedom, Klein; it's an impossible, intolerable interference."

"The deads are dead," Mortimer said. "We understand the depths of your feelings for your late wife, but this compulsive pursuit of her must be brought to an end."

"It will be," Klein said, staring at a point on the stucco wall midway between Zacharias and Sybille. "I want only an hour or two of private conversation with my — with Sybille, and then I promise you that there will be no further —"

"Just as you promised Anthony Gracchus," Mortimer said, "not to go to Zanzibar."

"I wanted —"

"We have our rights," said Zacharias. "We've gone through hell, literally through hell, to get where we are. You've infringed on our right to be left alone. You bother us. You bore us. You annoy us. We hate to be annoyed." He looked toward Sybille. She nodded. Zacharias' hand vanished into the breast pocket of his coat. Mortimer seized Klein's wrist with astonishing suddenness and jerked his arm forward. A minute metal tube glistened in Zacharias' huge fist. Klein had seen such a tube in the hand of Anthony Gracchus only the day before.

"No," Klein gasped. "I don't believe — *no!*"

Zacharias plunged the cold tip of the tube quickly into Klein's

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forearm.

"The freezer unit is coming," Mortimer said. "It'll be here in five minutes or less."

"What if it's late?" Sybille asked anxiously. "What if something irreversible happens to his brain before it gets here?"

"He's not even entirely dead yet," Zacharias reminded her. "There's time. There's ample time. I spoke to the doctor myself, a very intelligent Chinese, flawless command of English. He was most sympathetic. They'll have him frozen with a couple of minutes of death. We'll book cargo passage aboard the morning plane for Dar. He'll be in the United States within twenty-four hours, I guarantee that. San Diego will be notified. Everything will be all right, Sybille!"

Jorge Klein lay slumped across the table. The bar had emptied the moment he had cried out and lurched forward: the half-dozen customers had fled, not caring to mar their holidays by sharing an evening with the presence of death, and the waiters and bartenders, big-eyed, terrified, lurked in the hallway. A heart attack, Zacharias had announced, some kind of sudden attack, maybe a stroke, where's the telephone: No one had seen the tiny tube do its work.

Sybille trembled. "If anything goes wrong —"

"I hear the sirens now," Zacharias said.

From his desk at the airport Daud Mahmoud Barwani watched the bulky refrigerated coffin being loaded by grunting porters aboard the morning plane for Dar. And then, and then, and then? They would ship the dead man to the far side of the world, to America, and breathe new life into him, and he would go once more among men. Barwani shook his head. These people! The man who was alive is now dead, and these dead ones, who knows what they are? Who knows? Best that the dead remain dead, as was intended in the time of first things. Who could have foreseen a day when the dead returned from the grave? Not I. And who can foresee what we will all become, a hundred years from now? Not I. Not I. A hundred years from now I will sleep, Barwani thought. I will sleep, and it will not matter to me at all what sort of creatures walk the earth.

9.

We die with the dying:
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them.

T.S. Eliot: *Little Gidding*

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On the day of his awakening he saw no one except the attendants at the rekindling house, who bathed him and fed him and helped him to walk slowly around his room. They said nothing to him, nor he to them; words seemed irrelevant. He felt strange in his skin, too snugly contained, as though all his life he had worn ill-fitting clothes and now had for the first time encountered a competent tailor. The images that his eyes brought him were sharp, unnaturally clear, and faintly haloed by prismatic colors, an effect that imperceptibly vanished as the day passed. On the second day he was visited by the San Diego Guidefather, not at all the formidable patriarch he had imagined, but rather a cool, efficient executive, about fifty years old, who greeted him cordially and told him briefly of the disciplines and routines he must master before he could leave the Cold Town. "What month is this?" Klein asked, and Guidefather told him it was June, the seventeenth of June, 1993. He had slept four weeks.

Now it is the morning of the third day after his awakening, and he has guests: Sybille, Nerita, Zacharias, Mortimer, Gracchus. They file into his room and stand in an arc at the foot of his bed, radiant in the glow of light that pierces the narrow windows. Like demigods, like angels, glittering with a dazzling inward brilliance, and now he is of their company. Formally they embrace him, first Gracchus, then Nerita, then Mortimer. Zacharias advances next to his bedside, Zacharias who sent him into death, and he smiles at Klein, and Klein returns the smile, and they embrace. Then it is Sybille's turn: she slips her hand between his, he draws her close, her lips brush his cheek, his touch hers, his arm encircles her shoulders.

"Hello," she whispers.

"Hello," he says.

They ask him how he feels, how quickly his strength is returning, whether he has been out of bed yet, how soon he will commence his drying-off. The style of their conversation is the oblique, elliptical style favored by the deads, but not nearly so clipped and cryptic as the way of speech they normally would use among themselves; they are favoring him, leading him inch by inch into their customs. Within five minutes he thinks he is getting the knack.

He says, using their verbal shorthand, "I must have been a great burden to you."

"You were, you were," Zacharias agrees. "But all that is done with now."

"We forgive you," Mortimer says.

"We welcome you among us," declares Sybille.

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They talk about their plans for the months ahead. Sybille is nearly finished with her work on Zanzibar; she will retreat to Zion Cold Town for the summer months to write her thesis. Mortimer and Nerita are off to Mexico to tour the ancient temples and pyramids; Zacharias is going to Ohio, to his beloved mounds. In the autumn they will reassemble at Zion and plan the winter's amusement: a tour of Egypt, perhaps, or Peru, the heights of Machu Picchu. Ruins, archaeological sites, delight them; in the places where death has been busiest, their joy is most intense. They are flushed, excited, verbose — virtually chattering, now. Away we will go, to Zimbabwe, to Palenque, to Angkor, to Knossos, to Uxmal, to Nineveh, to Mohenjo-Daro. And as they go on and on, talking with hands and eyes and smiles and even words, even words, torrents of words, they blur and become unreal to him; they are mere dancing puppets jerking about a badly painted stage; they are droning insects, wasps or bees or mosquitoes, with all their talk of travels and festivals, of Boghazkoy and Babylon, of Megiddo and Massada; and he ceases to hear them; he tunes them out; he lies there smiling, eyes glazed, mind adrift. It perplexes him that he has so little interest in them. But then he realizes that it is a mark of his liberation. He is freed of old chains now. Will he join their set? Why should he? Perhaps he will travel with them, perhaps not, as the whim takes him. More likely not. Almost certainly not. He does not need their company. He has his own interests. He will follow Sybille about no longer. He does not need, he does not want, he will not seek. Why should he become one of them, rootless, an amoral wanderer, a ghost made flesh? Why should he embrace the values and customs of these people who had

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given him to death as dispassionately as they might swat an insect, only because he had bored them, because he had annoyed them? He does not hate them for what they did to him, he feels no resentment that he can identify, he merely chooses to detach himself from them. Let them float on from ruin to ruin, let them pursue death from continent to continent; he will go his own way. Now that he has crossed the interface, he finds that Sybille no longer matters to him.

—*Oh, sir, things change* —

"We'll go now," Sybille says softly.

He nods. He makes no other reply.

"We'll see you after your drying-off," Zacharias tells him, and touches him lightly with his knuckles, a farewell gesture used only by the deads.

"See you," Mortimer says.

"See you," says Gracchus.

"Soon," Nerita says.

Never, Klein says, saying it without words, but so they will understand. Never. Never. Never. I will never see any of you. I will never see you, Sybille. The syllables echo through his brain, and the word, *never, never, never,* rolls over him like the breaking surf, cleansing him, purifying him, healing him. He is free. He is alone.

"Good-by," Sybille calls from the hallway.

"Good-by," he says.

It was years before he saw her again. But they spent the last days of '99 together, shooting dodoes under the shadow of mighty Kilimanjaro.

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The writing of the profiles for these special issues seems to cause more gnashing of typewriter keys (not to mention extension of deadlines) than anything else we assign. ("This will be about the hardest money I've ever seen from professional writing." —BM) But in the end, all turns out well. ("I'm deeply honored and would murder anyone taking my place." —BM)

Robert Silverberg

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

He is a man of medium height, five feet seven perhaps, elegantly goateed, contained within himself, all the gestures of precise and small focus. The face seems impermeable, the high cheekbones, closed-in mouth pleasant but only in the conventional way; and then the gaze passes upward, catches the eyes, the eyes of Silverberg showing inexpressible knowledge, pain and insight and somewhere at the center of all this a flickering, cool attention.

Silverberg graduated from Columbia University in 1956, having throughout his senior year sold to almost all of the sf magazines (the *New Yorker* represents him as having made $200.00 a week out of science fiction before he was twenty-one: think of this) and took immediately to full-time writing. He married Barbara, moved into an apartment on the West Side of Manhattan and over the next ten years published approximately four hundred and fifty books and three times as many magazine pieces. The sf bibliography in this issue is probably the largest attributable to any writer in the field; his sf represents, at the most, fifteen percent of his output.

Silverberg stories of these early years are legion and (to suffering writers at least) dismaying; it is understood that a well-known mystery writer once agreed to share working space with Silverberg to split expenses. The arrangement lasted less than a week. "I'd come in in the morning," the mystery writer is reputed to have said, "and so would he and I'd sit there sweating and suffering to get out three pages and meanwhile, from the other desk behind the screen came the sound of the typewriter clicking, clacking, no interruptions, no breaks until twelve o'clock and then he'd come over to my desk and say 'time for lunch?' So we'd have lunch and then an hour later back

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to that desk, click clack for him, sweating for me and at five o'clock the typewriter lid would go *bang* and he'd come out say, 'goodnight,' and go home. I couldn't take it. I just couldn't stand it anymore. I couldn't write a word. He would have destroyed my career."

"There's no reason we should be such black writers," he said to me. "Actually we're very cheerful, forward-looking types."

"Exactly," I said, "I'm planning to work on something optimistic right now for the sex novel market, an upbeat novel about impotence."

"Too conventional," he said, "I've been thinking about a cheery novel of premature ejaculation, myself."

I pointed out to Silverberg with some pride that I hold the world's record for novel writing: a published novel in sixteen working hours, sixty-five thousand words, fifteen hundred dollars, "So you want to play productivity machismo, eh, wiseacre?" he said in a letter. "Well, look at this," and then passed on to me his working logs for 1962/3; it is indicated that in the latter year he produced one point nine million words distributed over forty-five books and a fair number of short stories. "As you can see," he noted, "your moaning and groaning about having nine novels due in eight months would have been cause for laughter for me back in those golden years."

So the man is prolific. Indeed, the man may be, in terms of accumulation of work per working year, the most prolific writer who ever lived. But to look merely at the prolificity is to miss the point (many people have even to this date; they cannot identify a serious record of accomplishment with a high production rate: reverse Protestant ethic for writers, you see) because in or around 1965 Silverberg put his toys away and began to write literature.

Now this is not as easy as it sounds, even for a Silverberg.

If there is one thing which quick commercial writing over a period of time will do for a man it is this: it is likely to destroy any capacity for artistry. You learn to do it the easy way, the quick way, splice the transitions, pad out the dialogue, move the pace along, and somewhere along the course of a hundred of more quick pieces written for the fast money not only the promise but the very will to write well is lost. After all, it hardly makes any difference in the long run. The work will get in Thursday, no one but the copyeditor (and then

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just barely) will ever read it, it will go into the markets and sell exactly what work of its packaged type always sells, and no one out there would know the difference or care. Upon such rationalizations does the commercial writer tread; furthermore they are not bad rationalizations, and a career in the marketplace can be sufficient to convince any intelligent writer, even a Silverberg, that it really does *not* matter. A thousand careers have been squeezed out in the paperback racket; pick up a Midwood or Kozy novel of those eras and see, in the phrase of A.J. Budrys, not a book but a gravestone.

Nevertheless, Silverberg began to write. He began to write very well. In the eight years since "Hawksbill Station" (*Galaxy*, August, 1967, by general agreement the first successful literary Silverberg, although there were hints and promise a few years before that*) he has published approximately fifteen science fiction novels, a hundred-plus science fiction short stories which are to a literary standard. It took people in the field a few years to realize what they had on their hands but, to their credit, only a little longer after that to know what to make of him.

*It is a source of pride and bemusement to me that my own first sf story, "We're Coming through the Windows," appeared in that issue.

"There's Silverberg," another writer said to me at an sf writers' party (there are less of these than you might think, and almost nobody drinks very much) some years ago, "look at him, pissed his life away in a hundred, five hundred bad books, thirty-five years old and all washed up."

"No," I said to him. (I will take what credit I can every step of the way.) "I don't think so. I don't think that's true at all. I think he's just beginning."

"Son of a bitch," this writer said to me (our conversation had adjourned for two and a half years, but we picked it up in a bar), "I can't believe it. The guy can really write. The man, goddamn it, is a real writer."

"Told you so," I pointed out.

The idea was to take the cliched, familiar themes of this field and do them right, handle them with the full range of modern literary technique. Science fiction written this way tended to be better than anything else, if it came off, because only science fiction these days is really worth reading or writing or talking about, the only branch of literature which is dealing with the basic issues of our time, which are simply the effects technology is having on people, the effects people are having on technology and the consequences of

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these small or large, always painful collisions day after day.

This kind of writing is, however, extremely difficult. It means in a novel, say, such as *The Second Trip,* dealing with questions of personality transference, telepathy, culpability and crime as if they had not been junked or glossed over in a hundred stories, some of them approved standards of the field, which settled for the quick commercial effect and dodged clear of the real issues. If it works, it is better than anything else going; but if it fails, the novel can founder underneath its gimmickry. Also, whether you succeed or fail, you are going to make an awful lot of people in our rather staid, conservative and ill-paying field quite mad. Silverberg has not failed, but then again —

Silverberg's problem in finding acceptance and critical attention in the larger body of literature (mistakenly labeled by most of us hereabouts the "mainstream") out there is the problem of any serious writer working within our form (there have been, all told, maybe fifteen who accumulated a body of work) but more serious for Silverberg because he is our best. Win one, lose one: have a reputation in science fiction and you can find a market for just about anything in our little field, but to the degree one has a reputation, is identifiable as a science fiction writer, one has difficulty breaking out. Vonnegut saw this early and often; as early as 1953 he commenced to shout that he was not a science fiction writer, and he has not shut up yet. This is difficult for the writer, of course. In its more extreme forms it leads to sweats, depression, self-revulsion and despair. In its more benign manifestation the disease may only be revealed by a certain brooding or unbrooding cynicism.

"How's it doing?" Silverberg asked me of my Random House novel *Beyond Apollo* two months after its publication last June.

"I wouldn't know," I said. "I haven't heard a thing. I assume it's dead. They're all dead, haven't you noticed? They all die." I am characterized by my generally upbeat attitude toward life and publishing. "Most of them are stillborn."

"More or less," he said, "more or less, which is why I believe you just try to get as much at the front end as possible, and let them worry about it."

"*The Book of Skulls* is a great novel," I said. "It's a great novel, it knocked my brains out. I can't touch it."

"Probably," he said. "I mean, I have a feeling it's good because I haven't heard a word about it."

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Barbara Silverberg takes off her glasses and abruptly changes from a very pretty woman in her midthirties to something else: a woman so beautiful, so stunningly beautiful in the revealed and reassembled lines of her face that it is necessary to look away, if only for a moment. I see. I see now what people mean about her. I see what they are saying. It all has to do with the taking off of the glasses.

Silverberg would reject a touch like this as imbecilic, or he would find a way to augment the inanity by stepping it up a few notches, say, to a face that could turn an *Analog* reject into the physical National Book Award certificate. In neither case would he use it as set down.

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"He was the only one at conventions who was nice to me," a young sf writer says. "When I was just breaking in, he was the only one of the professionals who treated me like a human being, who took the time with his wife to talk to us and make us feel at home. Now they all do it, but he was the first. It didn't seem to make any difference to him who I was."

Of the novels, I think I like *The Book of Skulls* the best, although it is not under any definition of the term science fiction. (It is simply the best novel signed by an American since Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association*. Of the science fiction novels, I guess that *Dying Inside* (which should have won all the awards of its year) is probably best, although *The Second Trip* is an astounding and astoundingly intense work-through of its themes, hard science fiction if ever such a thing existed. *Tower of Glass* is extraordinary. *Son of Man* I think is a failure (many people disagree), but *A Time of Changes*, which attacks the same material mirror-image, is entirely successful. Of the short stories, "Breckenbridge and the Continuum" is the most brilliant,

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exalted middle-length piece since Saul Bellow's "Seize the Day"; but work like *The Science-Fiction Hall of Fame,* "Black is Beautiful," "In Entropy's Jaws" ... a man could consider an entire career honorably spent if he had capped it with one of these (I feel that way about my "Final War," probably my only shorter work which can rank anywhere around the stories I've cited). What is there to say about a man who has done them all, *and all within the framework of commercial writing?* But then there is "Good News From The Vatican," with its incredible (and incredibly funny) metaphor which just goes and goes, soars over the rooftops like that robot Pope; there is "A Happy Day In 2381," which drops its theme and construction simultaneously down the chute in one well-timed scene; there is "Caught In the Organ Draft," which makes antiwar fiction as a genre now impossible —

—Silverberg is not nearly forty years old.

"You can get pretty discouraged," he wrote once, "but you go on, and I'm trying line by line, page by page, now to be the best writer I can possibly be at that moment of time, and that's all that you can ask or at least all I can ask of myself."

Robert Silverberg is now the best writer currently producing in English. I can't touch him. I don't think any of us can.

I've been chasing him, though, for many years. It's made me better.

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Tom Clareson, editor of *Extrapolation* (The Newsletter of The MLA Conference on Science Fiction) and Professor of English at the College of Wooster, offers a critical appreciation of the Silverberg canon.

Robert Silverberg: The Compleat Writer

by THOMAS D. CLARESON

Almost exactly seventeen years ago (May 1957), Robert Silverberg published "Warm Man," his first story in *F&SF*. In it he abandoned more conventional science fiction plots and settings for a realistic portrait of suburban society such as one finds in John Cheever's stories. More importantly, it enunciated some of those themes which have become dominant patterns in his fiction.

He has always been a first-rate storyteller, even while dealing with a tired plot like that of "Slaves of the Star Giants" (1956). When he turned to the Romeo and Juliet plot of "The Outbreeders" (1959) — that story of two quarreling clans descended from survivors of a starship crash — he provided a new twist: the phenotype duplications within each family resulting from the limited gene pools. His artistry has grown, of course, as he has become a less hurried, more experienced writer, and half the fun of reading any of his stories is to observe his increasing skill as he experiments with such technical matters as language and form.

His fiction readily invites specialized studies — as in *Extrapolation* (May, 1974), when Professor George Tuma analyzes his use of biblical myth in *Tower of Glass*. Of more general interest are those giving attention to how he has expanded a story into a novel. *Nightwings* provides the most obvious example, but his conversion of "Hopper" (1956) into *The Time Hoppers* may have greater value because of the time lapse between the original and final versions. And "The Man Who Never Forgot" (1958) assumes increased significance if it is

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thought of as *Dying Inside* with a happy ending. (Silverberg maintains, incidentally, that *Dying Inside's* ending is a "happy" one.)

Because Silverberg has been a deliberate craftsman from the first, his skill can free one to perform what may be the critic's most important task — to watch the development of thematic patterns.

"Warm Man" deals with the dark side of his themes, for Davis Hallihan, like a parasite, lives off the agony of those around him. Ironically, some of his emotionally crippled neighbors find pleasure — relief — in confessing to him, and thus is introduced the necessity of communication, however painful. In *The Seed of Earth* (1962) aliens kidnap four human colonists of their world so that they may watch and somehow feed upon the breakdown in the relationship of the four. In "Flies" (1967) aliens give life to a dead man so that he may return to earth and transmit the raw emotions of those about him. When he loses his humanity and inflicts pain wantonly upon those whom he encounters, the aliens readjust him so that he can communicate only his own emotions, his own agony. Perhaps the most terrible of these visions occurs in "The Pain Peddlers" (1963), in which the networks feed their audience's insatiable demand for vicarious pain.

This same darkness, most fully expressed in *Thorns*, sets the tone of such stories as "One Way Journey" (1957). His most obviously Freudian tale, it makes use of the affection between Matt Falk and Thetona, the ugly alien, to reveal Falk's isolation and despair. In a sense Silverberg has simply explored certain implications inherent in the relationship which Philip Jose Farmer portrayed in his deservedly praised *The Lovers*. Along this line, some readers have objected to the explicit sexuality of such recent novels as *Tower of Glass* and *Up the Line*. They may fail to perceive that he seldom uses sexuality for its own sake; most often he uses it to dramatize what must be the central concern of his fiction. And surely few readers miss the pathos of "Ishmael in Love" (1970), in which the porpoise begs the fair Elizabeth to recognize and accept his love. Here again occurs the failure of sentient beings to communicate.

Communication: that is the starting point, but that word alone fails to encompass his central concern. Consciously or unconsciously, like so many modern writers, Silverberg seems drawn to the dilemma of man isolated amid the fragmenting cultures of the contemporary world. Most often, despite the existence of his dark side, he seems dissatisfied with

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mere portraits of man's alienation. Thus, like Clifford Simak, he employs man's encounter with nonhuman intelligence, be it alien or android, to search for values which he and his readers may accept. Nor should one forget that his use of such familiar devices as telepathy, multiple personalities fused within a single consciousness, and time travel — as well as the theme of immortality — simply provide him a wider range of plot materials to work with as he seeks for those moments which transcend man's loneliness, man's separateness. Like Simak, he quests for unity.

The earliest suggestion of the importance of this theme seems to occur in his third novel, *Invaders from Earth* (1957). If one did not know its date, he might easily assign the novel to the late 1960's. Only the ending belies the later date.

The basic plot line grows out of the discovery by the Corporation's Development and Research Section, Ganymede Division, that that moon is both rich in radioactive materials and inhabited by intelligent but primitive aliens. Although — or perhaps because — the aliens are peaceful, the Corporation hires a public relations firm to persuade the Earth that the United Nations must underwrite the cost of military occupation, if not a hot war. To do this, this protogonist creates an imaginary colony, complete with women and children, so that he may arouse Earth emotionally against the threat of hostile natives. In terms of Silverberg's social and political criticism, the novel might well be one of his later works.

But when the protagonist goes to Ganymede in order to gather local color to give his deception greater authenticity, the emphasis shifts so that the novel becomes Silverberg's first attempt to present man's reaction to an alien culture. He observes the brutality of the Corporation men, especially their leader, toward both the natives and anyone sympathetic to them. He learns that nonviolence is crucial to the aliens' philosophy. They accept the conditions of their harsh world stoically, learning to live as part of nature, and they preach the need to respect all life — to understand the "currents of beingness."

Here is the essential kernel for his subsequent themes. The aliens are *people;* they provide a perspective from which to measure the conduct and nature of man; and they can teach him what he has ignored or forgotten. In 1957, however, the young Silverberg had yet to recognize the potential of this theme. Hardly had he enunciated it before he turned back to rely upon a fast-moving plot. Of course the protagonist made public the dirty

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schemes of the Corporation; of course he returned to Ganymede as the special envoy of the United Nations. But that was 1957.

A dozen years later he produced what is to date his fullest and most aesthetically satisfying account of the encounter between man and alien in *Downward to the Earth.* Because that novel has been so widely popular, no synopsis of its plot line seems necessary. Indeed, one realizes that the most obvious change in Silverberg during that interval lies in the absence of the complex, melodramatic plot action of his earlier works. The guilt-ridden Edmund Gunderson returns to Belzagor, the planet where he was once a colonial administrator. Haunted by his memories of the Nildoror, whom men had made slaves and called beasts, and fascinated by the mystery of their rebirth, he himself finally undergoes rebirth and thereby achieves a transcendence and a unity with the consciousness of the Nildoror.

By the time of *Downward to the Earth,* however, the reader is familiar with Silverberg's increasing concern for transcendence and the unity of all sentient beings. Thus, one must look elsewhere in order to explain the emotional and intellectual impact the novel has had. For me, its power lies in its ability to call up other stories which reinforce Silverberg's theme. For example, Gunderson brings to mind Fowler, Simak's protagonist in "Desertion," the fourth tale in *City.* Fowler denounces the limitations of man and chooses to remain a Lopar on Jupitar, as does the majority of mankind when given the opportunity. When Gunderson is told that he will no longer be human if he experiences rebirth, he replies, "I've tried being human for quite a while. Maybe it's time to be something else" (p. 118). That is, something more.

Yet for me, it is the character of Kurtz, lying ill and monstrously deformed, who provides the most valuable key. That name alone unlocks all of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* Thus does Silverberg gain reinforcements: the enigmatic jungle which is beyond the European experience; Conrad's degenerate Kurtz himself, dying and crazed by his own encounter; the Blacks who have been made slaves and called beasts; and the journey deep into the alien world of Africa.

This is not to say that Silverberg imitated Conrad or patterened his novel after the earlier work. Yet consciously or not, he had the skill to call to the reader's mind that earlier condemnation of man's brutality as an aid in presenting his own denunciation of man's cruelty and lack of understanding. In this regard, notice the role of the

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tourists on Belzagor; they fuse the comic and the grotesque as they wander even into the Mist Country. By evoking Conrad, Silverberg gave the novel a richness which many plot-oriented science fiction stories do not have. One may argue that the perception of this relationship is unnecessary to a basic enjoyment of the book, but surely few will argue that awareness of it does not add to the impact of *Downward to the Earth,* just as the prefatory quote from Ecclesiastes does. And, of course, by contrast, it serves to strengthen Silverberg's final affirmation.

If *Downward to the Earth* has added significance because of its artistry, then *Across a Billion Years,* also first published in 1969, has special significance because of the explicitness with which it states his central theme. It may be, unfortunately, the least known of his novels, for it was published only in hardback for a "young adult" audience. It, too, is presented as a quest. Tom Rice, its first-person narrator, accompanies a team of archaeologists to the site of a dig in order to search for artifacts of the Mirt Korp Ahm, the so-called High Ones, whose civilization once spread throughout the galaxy. Its episodic plot leads the team ever closer to the home world of the Mirt Korp Ahm. In one incidental scene, Rice converses with Kelly, the beautiful android woman, in a manner that both anticipates *Tower of Glass* and puts the central issue baldly before the reader. Perhaps because of the audience — or the urgency of the matter to him personally? — Silverberg is more openly didactic about discrimination and minorities than is usual for him. When Rice tries to explain that "Making life in a laboratory vat is...almost godlike," Kelly replies, "And so...you godlike ones show your godlike natures by feeling superior to the artificial human beings you create. ...Why not simply accept all distinctions and concentrate on matters of real importance?" (pp. 145-146).

Their quest takes Rice and his companions to the home world of the Mirt Korp Ahm. They finally face the High One — "frighteningly" withered and ancient, kept alive perhaps forever by life-support mechanisms, although it has the mind of a "vegetable...an insane vegetable." Nevertheless, across that billion years, it offers a gift not only to mankind but to "*all* organic life-forms." Rice finds a "thought amplifier" and communicates first with the telepathic minority which acts as a galactic communications network and then with a member of his own party. "...our minds met and became one" (p. 247). "And so," reflects Rice, "it is an end of secrecy and

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suspicion, of misunderstanding, of quarrels, of isolation, of flawed communications, of separation."

But it is no panacea in itself. As he goes to say farewell to the High One, Rice muses:

> ...and we'll tell it that we're the new people, the ones now filling the universe they once owned, the busy little seekers. And I think we'll ask it to pray for us, if there's anything that High Ones ever prayed to, because I have a feeling we're going to make plenty of mistakes before we know how to handle these powers we've so strangely acquired.
>
> (p. 249)

I, for one, wish that he would write further of those mistakes and that affirmation, but I sense from such recent works as *The Book of Skulls* and *Dying Inside* that Silverberg has already found a somewhat different perspective from which he wishes to examine the human condition.

No short article — or single book — can do more than touch the achievement of Robert Silverberg. If one dwells upon the development of this thematic pattern, he must seem to overlook other aspects of Silverberg's work. One could, for example, concentrate upon his dystopian nightmares from "Road to Nightfall" (1958) to *The World Inside*. To do so would give a different impression of his work. Nor should one forget his often grotesque and terrible humor, as in "Going Down Inside" (1968). *Up the Line* deserves attention because it masks his theme with what may seem to be light comedy. *Son of Man*, surely his most lyrical work, tempts one to close analysis. Pleasurable as any of these undertakings might be, they could distort or perhaps almost miss his central affirmation. At this time emphasis of that affirmation seems important because of those, sometimes within the science fiction community itself, who deride much contemporary sf because it does not adhere strictly to earlier conventions, earlier visions.

One thinks of those authors who seem to write the same story over and over again. John P. Marquand comes to mind. This has never been true of Silverberg, even in the early years of his career. Nor does he write formula stories. Time and again he has expanded the parameters of science fiction. One of the distinct pleasures of reading Silverberg comes from watching him deliberately manipulate his materials. This goes far beyond innovation or recombination of plot elements. There is that, of course, but in recent years particularly, it involves his conscious experi-

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HI-YO SILVERBERG!

Ballantine Books is having a Robert Silverberg Festival this year to celebrate publication of of his stunning new novel **Dying Inside!**

And reissued by popular demand three Silverberg classics:

Up the Line
Thorns
The Masks of Time

You'll find them all wherever paperback books are sold. Or, to order by mail, send $1.25 per book(s) plus 25¢ per order for handling to Ballantine Cash Sales, P.O. Box 505, Westminster, Maryland 21157. Please allow three weeks for delivery.

mentation with such technical matters as point of view and language. He exemplifies the conscious artist, making decisions to increase the effectiveness of his stories. Imagine, for example, how different (and less effective?) *Downward to the Earth* would have been had it been told from the first-person point of view of either Gunderson or one of the Nildorer, perhaps the one who hated the Earthman for preventing him from going to his rebirth. Imagine, too, the difference had the language been in the colloquial style of *Dying Inside*. In a similar vein, *The Book of Skulls* must include the personal narratives of each of the four young men if it is to explore its theme adequately. In each instance Silverberg has fused his content with the appropriate language and structure necessary to make the story reveal as much of the human experience as possible.

This emphasis upon technique — and the realization that all stories cannot be told in the same manner — is crucial. Silverberg's awareness of the problem is one significant mark of his growth

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during his career. Since such technicalities may be the concern of only the writer and a minority of his readers, there are other indications of his growth which may be of more general interest. Much has been said of science fiction as a literature of social and political commentary. The sf community has also long denied that sf is concerned primarily with gimmicks and gadgets. Instead, they say, its concern should be with the effects of science and technology — now and in the future — upon the individual and his culture. In short, those views insist that mere story is not enough. Science fiction, whether or not it makes a direct criticism of contemporary society, should reveal something of what it means to be human (that is, an intelligent, organic life form) in a given situation. On all counts, Silverberg has succeeded. *Tower of Glass* begins amid topical social criticism and moves to the question of the death of God. "Sundance," a delightful permutation of his central concern, begins, so to speak, from the question of whether or not man will recognize the aliens he encounters as intelligent beings having a complex structure of their own. One of his dark visions, it fuses the experience of the reader with that of Tom Two-Ribbons, passes through a condemnation of Western man's treatment of primitive peoples, and leaves the reader, like Tom, asking what is the truth of what has happened. And then there is *Dying Inside.* What I said last spring when I had the pleasure and honor of announcing the special John W. Campbell award given that novel may also be said of "Sundance." In both stories, for a moment Silverberg permits the reader to share the experience of another human being. I can really say nothing more, for that is what any literature is about. Then, too, that sharing, however brief, makes a small beginning to the communication, the unity, of all sentient beings of which Silverberg dreams.

I have not yet read "Born with the Dead." I look forward to sharing the experience with the readers of this issue. He will tell a good story, he will fuse together content and form, and he will add to our perception of the human condition in the 1970's. I am certain of these things for only one reason. Robert Silverberg is the compleat writer.

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ROBERT SILVERBERG: BIBLIOGRAPHY

by Donald H. Tuck

Robert Silverberg was a prolific science fiction writer under a number of pseudonyms in the mid 1950s, and this coverage is based on an early listing by Walter Cole covering these. A more recent bibliography was compiled by Mark Owings, and I express my thanks to both of these authorities.

The Bibliography is set out as follows:
FICTION: BOOKS; STORIES with collaborations at the end of each main listing.
NONFICTION: BOOKS - Titles only.
ANTHOLOGIES - Titles only.

Abbreviations are as follows: *Magazines* (Where full title not used) Amz - Amazing Stories, ASF - Astounding Science Fiction now Analog Science Fiction, Fan - Fantastic, F&SF - Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, FS Qly - Fantastic Stories Quarterly, FU - Fantastic Universe, Fut - Future (Science) Fiction, Gal - Galaxy, If - Worlds of If, Mag Horror - Magazine of Horror, NW - New Worlds, SF Adv - Science Fiction Adventures, SF Greats- Science Fiction Greats, SF Qly - Science Fiction Quarterly, SF Stories - Science Fiction Stories, Super SF - Super Science Fiction, Ven - Venture. *Other abbreviations:* Brit - British, ed - edition, mag - magazine, pa - paperback.

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Book of Skulls, The (Scribner, New York, 1972, 222 pp., $5.95) (Signet: Q5177, 1972, 191 pp., pa $.95)

Calibrated Alligator and Other Science Fiction Stories, The (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, N.Y., 1969, 224 pp., $4.95). Collection of 9 stories: "The Calibrated Alligator," "Blaze of Glory," "The Artifact Business," "Precedent," "Mugwump Four," "Why?" "His Head in the Clouds," "Point of Focus," "Delivery Guaranteed".

Collision Course (Avalon, N.Y., 1961, 224 pp., $2.95) (Ace: F-123, 1961, 135 pp., pa $.40/with *The Nemesis from Terra* L. Brackett) (Italian ed, 1961 mag) (German ed, 1962 mag). Short version first in Amz.

Conquerors from the Darkness (Holt, New York, 1965, 191 pp., $3.50; library ed $3.27) (Holt, Toronto, $4.00, $3.76) (Dell: 1456, 1968, 157 pp., pa $.50) Juvenile.

Cube Root of Uncertainty, The (Macmillan, N.Y., 1970, xiv+239 pp., $5.95) (Collier: 02539, 1971, xiv+239 pp., pa $1.25). Collection of 12 stories: "Passengers," "Double Dare," "The Sixth Palace," "Translation Error," "The Shadow of Wings," "Absolutely Inflexible," "The Iron Chancellor," "Mugwump Four," "To the Dark Star," "Neighbour," "Halfway House," "Sundance".

Day the Sun Stood Still, The (Nelson, Nashville, 1972, $5.95) Juvenile.

Dimension Thirteen (Ballantine: 01601, 1969, 215 pp., pa $.75) Collection of 13 stories: "Eve and the Twenty-Three Adams," "Warm Man," "By the Sea Wall," "Dark Companion," "The Four," "Bride Ninety-One," "World of a Thousand Colors," "En route to Earth," "The King of the Golden River," "Prime Commandment," "Halfway House," "Journey's End," "Solitary".

Downward to the Earth (Doubleday SF Book Club, N.Y., 1970, 180 pp., $1.49) (Signet: T4497, 1971, 176 pp., pa $.75) Serialized in Gal.

Dying Inside (Scribner, N.Y., 1972, 245 pp., $6.95) Serialized in Gal.

Earth's Other Shadow (Signet: Q5538, 1973, 207 pp., pa $.95). Collection of 9 stories: "Something Wild Is Loose," "To See the Invisible Man," "Ishmael in Love," "How It Was When the Past Went Away," "To the Dark Star," "The Fangs of the Trees," "Hidden Talent," "The Song the Zombie Sang," "Flies".

Gate of Worlds, The (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, N.Y., 1967, 244 pp., $4.50, library ed $3.97) Juvenile.

Godling, Go Home! (Belmont: L92-591, 1964, 157 pp., pa $.50) (German ed, 1968 mag). Collection of 11 stories/German 7 stories omitting 2, 3, 8 & 10/: "Godling, Go Home!" "Why?" "The Silent Colony," "Force of Mortality," "There's No Place Like Space," Neutral Planet," "The Lonely One," "Solitary," "The Man with Talent," "The Desiccator," "The World He Left Behind".

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Hawksbill Station (Doubleday, N.Y., 1967, 166 pp., $3.95) (retitled *the Anvil of Time*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1969, 192 pp. 21/-) (Avon: S411, 1970, 176 pp., pa $.60) (Tandem: 04124, 1970, 192 pp., pa 5/-). Enlargement of novelette from Ga.

Invaders from Earth (Ace: D-286, 1958, 169 pp., pa $.35/with *Across Time* D. Grinnell-(pseud of D.A. Wollheim) (German ed, 1959 mag, 1966 mag) (Avon: S365, 1968, 142 pp., pa $.60) (in *A Robert Silverberg Omnibus* 1970). Originally published as "We, the Marauders" in SF Qly, etc.

Invisible Barriers as by David Osborne (Avalon, N.Y. 1958, 223 pp., pa $2.75) Enlargement of "And the Walls Came Tumbling Down" in If under his own name.

Lest We Forget Thee, Earth as by Calvin M. Knox (Ace: D-291, 1958, 126 pp., pa $.35/with *People Minus X* R.Z. Gallun) (German ed, 1958 mag, 1967 mag) Revision of trilogy from Sf Adv.

Lost Race of Mars (Winston, Philadelphia, 1960, 118 pp., $2.95) (Scholastic: TX535, 1964, 123 pp., pa $.35) Juvenile

Man in the Maze, The (Avon: V2262, 1969, 192 pp., pa $.75) (Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1969, 192 pp., 24/-) (Tandem: 5100, 1971, 192 pp., pa 5/-). Serialized in If.

Masks of Time, The (Ballantine: U6121, 1968, 252 pp., pa $.75) (retitled *Vornan-19*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1970, 252 pp., 30/-; Tandem: 6445, 1972, 252 pp., pa 30p)

Master of Life and Death (Ace: D-237, 1957, 163 pp., pa $.35/with *The Secret Visitors* J. White/) (Avon: S329, 1968, 144 pp., pa $.60)

Moonferns and Starsongs (Ballantine: 02278, 1971, viii+245 pp., pa $.95). Collection of 11 stories: "A Happy Day in 2381," "After the Myths Went Home," "Passengers," "To Be Continued," "Nightwings," "We Know Why We Are," "The Pleasure of Their Company," "The Songs of Summer," "A Man of Talent," "Collecting Team," (retitle) "Going Down Smooth".

Needle in a Timestack (Ballantine: U2330, 1966, 190 pp., pa $.50; #02024, 1970, pa $.75) (Sphere: 78417, 1967, 190 pp., pa 5/-; #78433, 1970, pa 5/-). Collection of 10 stories: "The Pain Peddlers," "Passport to Sirius," "Birds of a Feather," "There Was an Old Woman," "The Shadow of Wings," "Absolutely Inflexible," "His Brother's Weeper," "The Sixth Palace," "To See the Invisible Man," "The Iron Chancellor".

Next Stop the Stars (Ace: F-145, 1962, 114 pp., pa $.40/with *Seed of Earth* R. Silverberg/). Collection of 5 stories: "Slaves of the Star Giants," "The Songs of Summer," "Hopper," "Blaze of Glory," "Warm Man".

Nightwings (Avon: V2303, 1969, 190 pp., pa $.75; 1972, pa $.75) (Walker, N.Y., 1970, 190 pp., Jacket-J. Gaughan, $4.95) (Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1972, 190 pp., 1.60 pd.). Novelization of trilogy from Gal.

One of Our Asteroids Is Missing as by Calvin M. Knox (Ace: F-253, 1964, 124 pp., pa $.40/with *The Twisted Men* A. E. van Vogt/) (German ed, 1965 mag)

Parsecs and Parables (Doubleday, N.Y., 1970, x+203 pp., $4.95). Collection of 10 stories: "The Man Who Never Forgot," "Ishmael in Love," "One-Way Journey," "Sunrise on Mercury," "The Out-Breeders," "Road to Nightfall," "Going down Smooth," "Counterpart," "Flies," "The Fangs of the Trees".

Planet Killers, The (Ace: D-407, 1959, 131 pp., pa $.35/with *We Claim These Stars* P. Anderson/) (German ed, 1960 mag). Originally published under pseudonym in SF Adv.

Planet of Death (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, N.Y., 1967, 125 pp., $2.95, library ed $2.93) Juvenile.

Plot Against Earth, The as by Calvin M. Knox (Ace: D-358, 1959, 138 pp., pa $.35/with *Recruit for Andromeda* M. Lesser/) (German ed, 1960 book, 1960 mag (2 titles from different publishers).

Reality Trip and Other Implausibilities, The (Ballantine: 02548, 1972, 210 pp., pa $.95). Collection of 8 stories: "In Entropy's Jaws," "The Reality Trip," "Black Is Beautiful," "Ozymandias," "Caliban," "The Shrines of Earth," "Ringing the Changes," "Hawksbill Station".

Recalled to Life (Lancer: 74-810, 1962, 144 pp., pa $.75; 72-156, 1967, pa $.50) (Italian ed, 1965 mag) (Doubleday, N.Y., 1972, 184 pp., $4.95). Originally serialized in Infinity.

Regan's Planet (Pyramid: F-986, 1964, 141 pp., pa $.40) (Italian ed, 1965 mag) (*World's Fair 1992*, Follett Pub. Co., N.Y., 1970, 248 pp., $4.95)

Revolt on Alpha C (Crowell, N.Y., 1955, 148 pp., $2.00) (TAB: TX137, 1959, 118 pp., pa $.25) (Italian ed., 1960 pa) Juvenile.

Robert Silverberg Omnibus, A (Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1970, iv+144+142+vi+182 pp., 35/-). The three novels: *Master of Life and Death, Invaders from Earth, The Time Hoppers.*

Second Trip, The (Doubleday SF Book Club, 1972, $1.49) (Signet: Q5402, 1973, 192 pp., pa $.95) Serialized in Amz.

Seed of Earth, The (Ace: F-145, 1962, 139 pp., pa $.40/with *Next Stop the Stars* R. Silverberg/) (Italian ed, 1963 book)

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Silent Invaders, The (Ace: F-195, 1963, 117 pp., pa $.40/with *Battle on Venus* W. F. Temple) Originally published under pseudonym in Infinity, later appearing in SF Adv (Brit).

Son of Man (Ballantine: 02277, 1971, 215 pp., pa $1.25)

Starhaven as by Ivar Jorgenson (Avalon, N.Y., 1958, 220 pp., $2.75) (Ace: D-351, 1959, 146 pp., pa $.35/with *The Sun Smasher* E. Hamilton/) (German ed, 1959 mag) (Italian ed, 1959 mag) Originally published as "Thunder over Starhaven" SF Adv.

Starman's Quest (Gnome, N.Y. 1959, 185 pp., $3.00) (Burns MacEachern, Toronto, $3.50) (German ed, 1960 mag) (Spanish ed, 1960 pa) (Italian ed, 1962 mag) (Meredith, N.Y., 1969, 186 pp., $4.95) Juvenile.

Stepsons of Terra (Ace: D-311, 1959, 158 pp., pa $.35/with *A Man Called Destiny* L. Wright/) (German ed, 1959 mag) Originally published as "Shadow on the Stars" SF Adv.

13th Immortal, The (Ace:: D-223, 1957, 129 pp., pa $.35/with *This Fortress World* J.E. Gunn) (German ed, 1962 mag)

Thorns (Ballantine: U6097, 1967, 222 pp., pa $.75; #02026, 1970, pa $.75) (Walker, N.Y., 1969, 222 pp., $4.95) (Rapp & Whiting, London, 1969, 222 pp., 25/-)

Those Who Watch (Signet¶ P3160, 1967, 143 pp., pa $.60; T4496, 1971, pa $.75) (German ed, 1968 mag)

Three Survived (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, N.Y., 1969, 117 pp., $2.95) Expansion of title story in Super SF.

Time Hoppers, The (Doubleday, N.Y., 1967, 182 pp, $3.95) (D'day SF Book Club, 1967, $1.70) (Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1968, 182 pp., 18/-) (Avon: S372, 1968, 158 pp., pa $.60) (German ed, 1968 mag) (Italian ed, 1968 mag) (in *A Robert Silverberg Omnibus* 1970) (Tandem: 04124, 1970, 190 pp., pa 5/-) (in *Science Fiction Special No. 3*/Anon/Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971)

Time of Changes, A (Doubleday, N.Y., 1971, 183 pp., $5.95) (Signet: Q4729, 1971, 220 pp., pa $.95) Originally serialized in Gal.

Time of the Great Freeze (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, N.Y., 1964, 192 pp., $3.50, library ed $3.27) (Ditto, Toronto, $4.05, $3.76) (Dell: 8922, 1966, 192 pp., pa $.50) Juvenile.

To Live Again (Doubleday, N.Y., 1969, viii+231 pp., $4.95) (D'day SF Book Club, 1969, $1.49) (Dell: 8973, 1971, 207 pp., pa $.75)

To Open the Sky (Ballantine: U6093, 1967, 222 pp., pa $.75; #02025, 1970, pa $.75) (Sphere: 78409, 1970, 203 pp., pa 6/-). Based on the Gal stories: "Blue Fire," "The Warriors of Light," "Where the Changed Ones Go," "Lazarus Come Forth," "Open the Sky".

To Worlds Beyond (Chilton, Philadelphia, 1965, 170 pp., $3.95) (German ed, 1966 mag) (Sphere: 78425, 1969, 157 pp., pa 5/-). Collection of 9 stories/German 7 stories omitting 3 & 8/: "The Old Man," "New Men for Mars," "Collecting Team," "Double Dare," "The Overlord's Thumb," "Ozymandias," "Certainty," "Mind for Business," "Misfit".

Tower of Glass, The (Scribner, N.Y. 1970, 247 pp., $5.95) (Bantam: S6902, 1971, 185 pp., pa $.75) Serialized in Gal.

Up the Line (Ballantine: 01680, 1969, 250 pp., pa $.75) Serialized in Amz.

Valley Beyond Time (Dell 9246, 1973, pa $.95)

Vornan-19 see *Masks of Time, The*

We, the Marauders see *Invaders from Earth*

World Inside, The (Doubleday, N.Y., 1971, 201 pp., $4.95) (D'day SF Book Club, 1972, $1.49) (Signet: Q5176, 1972, 174 pp., pa $.95). Covers the *Gal* stories: "The Throwbacks," "The World Outside," "We Are Well Organized," "All the Way Up, All the Way Down".

World's Fair 1992 see *Regan's Planet*

with Randall Garrett

Dawning Light, The all appearances as by Robert Randall (Gnome, N.Y., 1959, 191 pp., $3.00) (Italian ed, 1959 mag) (Mayflower: 1678, 1964, 189 pp., pa 3/6) (German ed, 1964 mag). Originally serialized in *ASF*) second book of 'Nidor' Series.

Shrouded Planet, The all appearances as by Robert Randall (Gnome, N.Y. 1957, 188 pp., $3.00) (German ed, 1959 mag, 1964 mag) (Mayflower: 7881, 1964, 192 pp., pa 3/6). First book of 'Nidor' Series covering the *ASF* stories: "The Chosen People," "The Promised Land," "False Prophet".

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FICTION: STORIES

Absolutely Inflexible, FU 7/56; NW 6/58
After the Myths Went Home, F&SF 11/69
Age of Anxiety, Infinity 6/57
Alaree, Saturn 3/58
Aliens Were Haters, The, Super SF 12/58
All the Way Up, All the Way Down, Gal 7/71; written into *The World Inside*
Always, Nebula 3/56
And the Walls Came Tumbling Down, *see* *Invisible Barriers*
Android Kill, The, as Alexander Blade Imaginative Tales 11/57
Anvil of Time, The, *see* Hawksbill Station
Anything His Heart Desires, Dream World 8/57
Appropriation, Saturn 5/59; NW 12/59
Artifact Business, The, FU 4/57
As Is, Worlds of Fantasy #1 1968
Assassin, The, Imaginative Tales 7/57
At the End of Days, NW 9/65; Mag Horror 5/69
Back from the Grave, Mike Shayne's Mystery Mag 1958
Beasts of Nightmare Horror, as Richard F. Watson Super SF 6/59
Birds of a Feather, Gal 11/58
Black Is Beautiful, original in *The Year 2000*/H. Harrison/Doubleday, 1970
Blaze of Glory, Gal 8/57
Blue Fire, Gal 6/65; written into *To Open the Sky*
Blue Plague, The, Amz 7/57
Bride Ninety-One, If 9/67
By the Seawall, If 1/67
Caliban, original in *Infinity Three*, R. Hoskins, Lancer, 1972
Calibrated Alligator, The, as by Calvin M. Knox ASF 2/60
Call Me Zombie! Fan 8/57; SF Greats Win 69
Castaways of Space, as Dan Malcolm Super SF 10/58
Catch 'Em All Alive! *see* Collecting Team
Caught in the Organ Draft, Vertex 4/73
Certainty, ASF 11/59
Chalice of Death, as by Calvin M. Knox SF Adv 6/57, written into *Lest We Forget Thee, Earth*
Choke Chain, Fan 12/56
Citadel of Darkness, as by Ralph Burke Fan 3/57
Cold-Blooded Ones, The, as by Calvin M. Knox Super SF 8/58
Collecting Team, *as* Catch 'Em All Alive! Super SF 12/56; Authentic 6/57
Collision Course, Amz 7/59; Book
Company Store, original in *Star SF Stories #5*, F. Pohl, Ballantine, 1959
Constabulary Duty, as by Calvin M. Knox SF Stories 6/58
Cosmic Kill, as Robert Arnette Amz sr2 4/57
Counterpart, FU 10/59; Science Fantasy 6/60
Critical Threshold, NW 12/57
Cry for Help, A, as Eric Rodman Super SF 4/59
Dark Companion, Amz 1/61; Most Thrilling SF SF Spr 68
Day the Monsters Broke Loose, The, Super SF 6/59
Dead World, The, as Warren Kastel Imaginative Tales 9/57
Death's Planet, Super SF 10/57
Delivery Guaranteed, as Calvin M. Knox SF Stories 2/59
Desiccator, The, SF Stories 5/56
Double Dare, Gal 11/56
Downward to the Earth, Gal sr4 11/69; Book
Dream Girl, Fan 6/56
Dying Inside, Gal sr2 7/72; Book
Earth Shall Live Again!, as Calvin M. Knox SF Adv 12/57, written into *Lest We Forget Thee, Earth*
Earthman's Burden, NW 2/59
En Route to Earth, as Calvin M. Knox SF Qly 8/57
Enemy of Peace, An, as Ralph Burke Fan 2/57
Entrance Exam, Amz 6/56; Great SF Apr 68
Eve and the 23 Adams, Venture 3/58
Exiled from Earth, as Richard F. Watson Super SF 12/58
Eye of the Beholder, SF Stories 9/59
Fangs of the Trees, The, F&SF 10/69
Father Image, Saturn 3/57
Fight with the Gorgon, The, *see* Gorgon Planet
Final Challenge, The, Infinity 8/56
Fires Die Down, The, Nebula 6/58; Famous SF Sum 68
Flame and the Hammer, The, SF Adv 9/57
Flies, original in *Dangerous Visions*, H. Ellison, Doubleday, 1967
Force of Mortality, Fut Fall 57
Forgotten World, Fan 3/57; Great SF Win 68
Four, The, as Calvin M. Knox SF Stories 8/58
Freak Show, as Hall Thornton Fan 3/57
Frontier Planet, as Calvin M. Knox Super SF 6/58
Fueling Stop, as Calvin M. Knox Fut 10/58
Galactic Thrill Kids, Super SF 4/57
Gateway to Terror, Space Travel 11/58
Godling, Go Home! SF Stories 1/57; Nebula 4/58
Going, original in *Four Features*/Anon/Hawthorn, 1971
Going Down Smooth, Gal 8/68
Good News from the Vatican, original in *Universe 1*, T. Carr, Ace 1971
Gorgon Planet, Nebula 2/54; *as* The Flight with the Gorgon, Super SF 10/58
Guardian Devil, Fan 5/59
Guardian of the Crystal Gate, Fan 8/56; SF Greats Win 69
Guest Rites, The, Infinity 2/57
Halfway House, If 11/66
Happy Day in 2381, A, original in *Nova 1*, H. Harrison, Delacorte 1970

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Happy Sleepers, The, as Calvin M. Knox Super SF 2/58
Happy Unfortunate, The, Amz 12/57; SF Greats Win 69
Harwood's Vortex, Imagination 4/57
Hawksbill Station, Gal 8/67
Heap Big Medicine, *see* Strong Waters
Heir Reluctant, ASF 6/58
Hi Diddle Diddle! as Calvin M. Knox ASF 2/59
Hidden Talent, If 4/57; Science Fantasy 10/57
His Brother's Weeper, FU 3/59
His Head in the Clouds, as Calvin M. Knox SF Stories 9/57
Hole in the Air, Amz 1/56; SF Greats Win 69
Homecoming Horde, Imagination 8/58
Hopper, Infinity 10/56
Horror in the Attic, The, as Alex Merriman Super SF 8/59
House Divided, Nebula 12/58
Housemaid No. 103, as Ivar Jorgenson Imaginative Tales 11/57
How It Was When the Past Went Away, original in *Three for Tomorrow*, R. Silverberg, Meredith 1969
Hunt the Space Witch, as Ivar Jorgenson SF Adv 1/58
Hunted Heroes, The, Amz 9/56
Hunters of Cutwold, The, as Calvin M. Knox Super SF 12/57
Impossible Intelligence, The, SF Stories 11/59
In Entropy's Jaws, original in *Infinity Two*, R. Hoskins, Lancer 1971
In Gratitude, *see* There Was an Old Woman
In the Beginning, original in *Science Against Man*, A. Cheetham, Avon 1970
In the Group, original in *Eros in Orbit*, J. Elder, Trident 1973
Insidious Invaders, The, as Eric Rodman Super SF 10/59
Invaders from Earth, *as* We, The Marauders SF Qly 2/58
Invasion Vanguard, as T. D. Bethlen SF Stories 5/58
Invisible Barriers, *as* And the Walls Came Tumbling Down If 12/57; Book
Iron Chancellor, The, Gal 5/58
Ishmael in Love, F&SF 7/70
Isolationist, The, as George Osborne SF Stories 11/58
Journey's End, *see* The Seed of Earth
King of the Golden River, *see* King of the Golden World
King of the Golden World, Gal 12/67; *as* King of the Golden River
Lair of the Dragonbird, Imagination 12/56
Lazarus Come Forth, Gal 4/66
Leisure Class, FU 7/59
Loathsome Beasts, The, as Dan Malcolm Super SF 10/59
Lonely Ones, The, SF Stories 7/56; NW 3/58
Look Homeward, Spaceman, as Calvin M. Knox Amz 8/56; SF Greats Win 69
Lunatic Planet, The, as Ralph Burke Amz 11/57; SF Greats Win 69
Lure of Galaxy A, The, as Ivar Jorgenson Imaginative Tales 3/58
Macauley Circuit, The, FU 8/56; NW 4/58
Madman on Board, A, Imagination 2/58
Malnutrition, NW 7/59
Man in the Maze, The, If sr2 4/68; Book
Man of Many Bodies, as Ralph Burke Fan 12/56
Man of Talent, A, *see* The Man with Talent
Man Who Came Back, The, NW 2/61
Man Who Never Forgot, The, F&SF 2/58; Science Fantasy 12/58
Man with Talent, The, Fut Win 56; Science Fantasy 8/57
Martian, The, Imagination 6/55
Mind for Business, ASF 9/56
Misfit, Super SF 12/57
Monday Immortal, as Ralph Burke Fan 5/57
Monsters That Once Were Men, as Eric Rodman Super SF 8/59
Moon Is New, The, as David Osborne Fut 4/59
Moon of Death, as E. K. Jarvis Great SF 5/66
Mournful Monster, as Dan Malcolm Super SF 4/59
Mugwump Four, Gal 8/59
Mystery of Deneb IV, The, Fan 2/57
Nature of the Place, The, F&SF 2/63
Neighbor, Gal 8/64
Neutral Planet, SF Stories 7/57
Never Trust a Thief! as Ivar Jorgenson Imagination 2/58
New Men for Mars, as Calvin M. Knox Super SF 6/57
New Year's Eve, 2,000 A.D., as Ivar Jorgenson Imaginative Tales 2/57
Nightwings, Gal 9/68 enlarged as Book
No Way Out, ASF 2/58
Nudes of Quendar III, The, Imaginative Tales 1/57
O' Captain, My Captain, as Ivar Jorgenson Fan 8/56; SF Greats Win 69
Old Man, The, as S. M. Tenneshaw Imagination 4/57
One-Way Journey, Infinity 11/57
Open the Sky, Gal 6/66
Outbreeders, The, as Calvin M. Knox FU 9/59
Outcast of the Stars, Imagination 2/57
Outpost Peril, Imaginative Tales 9/57
Overlord of Colony Eight, Imagination 10/57
Overlord's Thumb, The, Infinity 3/58
Ozymandias, as Ivar Jorgenson Infinity 11/58; NW 5/60
Pain Peddlers, The, Gal 8/63
Passengers, original in *Orbit 4*, D. Knight, Putnam 1968

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Passport to Sirius, If 4/58
Perris Way, Gal 11/68; written into *Nightwings*
Planet All My Own, A, as Richard F. Watson Super SF 8/58
Planet Killers, The, *as* This World Must Die! SF Adv 8/57, both under pseud Ivar Jorgenson.
Planet of Parasites, as Calvin M. Knox Super SF 4/58
Planet of the Angry Giants, as Dirk Clinton Super SF 8/59
Pleasure of Our Company, The, original in *Infinity One*, R. Hoskins, Lancer 1970
Point of Focus, ASF 8/58
Postmark Ganymede, Amz 9/57
Precedent, ASF 12/57
Prime Commandment, as Calvin M. Knox SF Stories 1/58
Prison Planet, Super SF 2/58
Push No More, original in *Strange Bedfellows: Sex and Science Fiction*, T. N. Scortia, Random House 1973
Quick Freeze, SF Qly 5/57; NW 5/57
Reality Trip, The, If 5/70
Reality Unlimited, Imagination 8/57
Recalled to Life, Infinity sr2 6/58; Book
Reconditioned Human, Super SF 2/59
Reluctant Traitor, The, as Ralph Burke SF Adv 6/58
Rescue Mission, Imagination 12/57
Revolt of the Synthetics, as Robert Burke Fan 8/56
Ringing the Changes, original in *Alchemy and Academe*, A. McCaffrey, Doubleday 1970
Rivals, The, Amz 11/56
Road to Nightfall, FU 7/58
Run of Luck, as Calvin M. Knox Amz 7/56
Run of the Mill, ASF 7/57
Science Fiction Hall of Fame, original in *Infinity 5*, R. Hoskins, 1973 pa.
Season for Remorse, A, Fut Sum 57
Second Trip, The, AS sr2 7/71; Book
Seed of Earth, The, Super SF 4/57
Seed of Earth, The, Gal 6/62; Book (Above title not connected)
Shadow of Wings, The, If 7/63
Shadow on the Stars, SF Adv 4/58; as *Stepsons of Terra*
Shrines of Earth, The, ASF 11/57
Silent Colony, The, Fut 10/54
Silent Invaders, The, as Calvin M. Knox Infinity 10/58
Sixth Palace, The, Gal 2/65
Slaves of the Star Giants, SF Adv 2/57
Slaves of the Tree, as Eric Rodman Super SF 6/58
Slice of Life, as Calvin M. Knox Infinity 4/58, NW 8/58
Solitary, Fut Spr 57; Nebula 3/58
Something Wild Is Loose, original in *The Many Worlds of Science Fiction*, B. Bova, Dutton 1971
Song the Zombie Sang, The, Cosmopolitan Dec 70
Songs of Summer, The, SF Stories 9/56; Authentic 7/57
Sourdough, ASF 11/56
Spacerogue, as Webber Martin Infinity 11/58
Spawn of the Deadly Sea, SF Adv 4/57
Starhaven, *as* Thunder over Starhaven, by Ivar Jorgenson SF Adv 10/57; Book
Starship Saboteur, Imaginative Tales 3/57
Stay out of My Grave, as Ralph Burke Amz 7/56
Still Small Voice, The, Amz 5/60
Stress Pattern, ASF 1/60
Strong Waters, Nebula 1/58; *as* Heap Big Medicine
Subterfuge, Amz 3/60
Sundance, F&SF 6/69
Sunrise on Mercury, as Calvin M. Knox SF Stories 5/57
Swords against the Outworlds, as Calvin M. Knox Fan 3/57
There Was an Old Woman, Infinity 11/58
There's No Place Like Space, SF Stories 5/59
3117 Half-Credit Uncirculated, as Alexander Blade SF Adv 6/58
This World Must Die, *see* The Planet Killers
Three Survived, Super SF 8/57; Book
Throwbacks, The, Gal 7/70; written into *The World Inside*
Thunder over Starhaven, *see* Starhaven
Time for Revenge, A, as Calvin M. Knox Super SF 10/57
Time of Changes, A, Gal sr3 3/71; Book
To Be Continued, ASF 5/56
To Jorslem, Gal 2/69; written into *Nightwings*
To See the Invisible Man, Worlds of Tomorrow 4/63
To the Dark Star, original in *The Farthest Reaches*, J. Elder, Trident 1969
Tower of Glass, The, Gal sr3 3/70; Book
Traitor Legion, Imaginative Tales 1/58
Translation Error, ASF 3/59
Twelve Hours to Blow! Imaginative Tales 5/57
Unbeliever, The, Mag Horror 8/63
Unique and Terrible Compulsion, The, as Calvin M. Knox Super SF 12/58
Unknown Soldier of Space, Imaginative Tales 5/58
Untouchables, The, as Calvin M. Knox Super SF 10/58
Up the Line, Amz sr2 7/69; Book
Valley beyond Time, SF Adv 12/57; Science Fantasy 2/58
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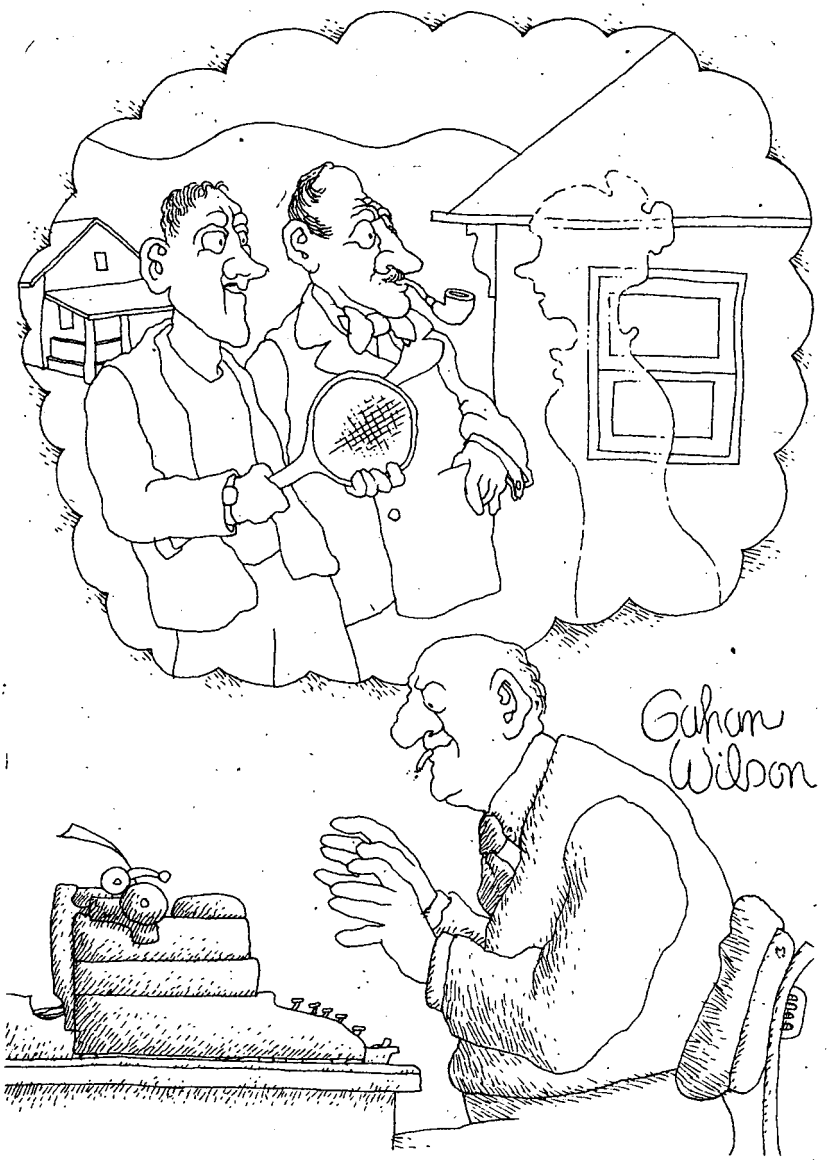

"Good grief — he's writing out Lucille!"

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Mr. Brennan's new story goes back to a classic sf theme and gives it a subtle and ingenious new twist.

Mammoth

by HERBIE BRENNAN

Larsson, who took amusement from the oddest things, walked into the office waving one of the new sub-ether cables and grinning.

"You won't believe it," he said. "They've found an elephant."

Graves glanced up, mildly surprised. "Is this Bergen?"

"That's right," Larsson nodded, grinning.

"They found an elephant?"

Still grinning, Larsson said, "Amazing, isn't it?"

"In Antarctica?"

"Yes."

Graves frowned. "Not alive, is it?"

Larsson dropped the cable on the desk and sat down. "Hardly. But it's very well preserved. One of those big woolly elephants we used to hunt as cavemen."

"Mammoth?"

"That's right. Every so often I forget the English word. Mammoth. The things with the curled tusks."

"Mmm," Graves nodded. He dropped the cable into the slot in his desk and snapped the magnetic contact to the disk implanted behind his ear. Bergen's voice sounded in his mind, apparently speaking English.

He had, as Larsson had reported, found a mammoth. It was preserved, intact, in ice quite near the Pole.

He was wondering what to do about it.

Graves broke the contact and stared at Larsson with a growing amusement of his own. "Rather a surprising development. I wonder what the boys upstairs will think of it."

"Heaven knows," Larsson sighed. Some of the amusement faded from his eyes. "They'll have to vote us enough money to bring the damn thing back, won't they?"

Graves shook his head very slowly from side to side. "No 'have to' about it. They might vote us the money or they might not."

The amusement died com-

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pletely. "Just a minute, this is a pretty damn important discovery. Bergen says as far as he can see it's totally preserved: skin and flesh. There's even a chance the eyeballs might be intact. Incredible preservation. There's no question of just leaving it there. Doesn't even seem to be your woolly variety either."

"Bergen's cost a third more than anticipated already. Have you any idea how much more transporting a thing like that would add to the bill?"

"No," Larsson admitted. "How much?"

"I don't know either," Graves said. "But just off the top of my head I know it isn't going to be cheap. I'd say our best bet economically would be to cut the entire block out of the ice field. That way we'd only have to worry about transportation, not refrigeration — at least for a while. But cutting a block that size..."

"You could use a laser cutter," Larsson suggested. "Any fool can use one, provided he's careful. You'd have the whole job done in a couple of hours. Like slicing cake."

"Mmm," Graves said again. It would mean special permission from somewhere. Laser cutters were illegal because they converted so easily into weapons.

"Could existing transport handle the block?" Larsson asked.

"I doubt it."

"If we sent out four more power sleighs and ran them in tandem, that should get it to the coast. The *Compton* has enough gear to get it on board surely?"

Graves nodded. "I should imagine so. It cost enough to equip."

"Well, then," Larsson said.

After a long while, Graves said thoughtfully, "Supposing I can get them to vote enough cash, would you be prepared to go out there and supervise?"

"Yes." Larsson said.

"Can you shelve off your other projects okay?"

"Yes."

"Graves stood up. "I'll see what I can do."

TWO

Hand walked down the antiseptic corridors in a daze. One of the women personnel passed him, smiled and nodded, then looked fleetingly puzzled when he ignored her. He took the jump chute to the twenty-second floor, the walkway to Area Q, and a transporter to the office of Sebelious.

He was still in a daze when he reached it.

Marsha Dawn, a bitch if ever there was one, kept him waiting nearly fifteen minutes, but for once he did not really care. He was numb. When she finally showed him in, he simply dropped the

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print-out on the desk and waited.

Sebelious tapped the papers with an antique pencil. "Well?"

"Read them," Hand said.

"Oh, for God's sake!" Sebelious was a tiny balding man, perpetually irate. He lifted the print-out and glanced through it. "Oh, for God's sake," he said again, "can't you save me trouble for once in your life? Do I have to plough through all this rubbish? You've obviously read it: what's it all about?"

"Polar shift and comets," Hand said stonily. Some of the numbness was leaving him. His legs felt shaky and he sat down.

Sebelious shook his head with irate patience. "I know it's about polar shift and comets, Mr. Hand. I know that. But what's it *about* — that's what I'd really like to know. Have you been on drugs?"

Surprised, Hand said, "No, of course not."

"You look pale. I thought you might have been popping something; everybody seems to be popping something nowadays. What's in this?" He tapped the print-out against the surface of the desk. It shimmered slightly.

"The computers predict a Z-level probability that the bloody thing will be back somewhere between fifteen and fifty years," Hand said bluntly. "If it does, we're in for a reversal of spin and —" He shrugged. "— wipeout." To his surprise, Sebelious looked unimpressed. He leaned forward. "Wipeout!" he said again.

"Z-level probability means the computers haven't enough information," Sebelious said flatly.

"I know that!" Hand told him. "But if you take the trouble of actually *reading* that report, you'll find the difference between Z-probability and alpha-probability is a single unit. *A single unit!*"

To his astonishment, Sebelious smiled. The smiled developed into a giggle, a dry, coughing sound that might have been the sympton of some disease. "Do you know how often I've come up against Z-level probabilities since I took over this job, Mr. Hand? Do you?" When Hand shook his head, Sebelious went on: "Seven hundred and fifty-seven times." The giggle came again. "Do you know how often it took one unit to convert Z-level into alpha-level? Three hundred and two!" The bright little black eyes burned. "Do you know how often that one unit of information has turned up subsequently, Mr. Hand?" He waited again until Hand shook his head, then said triumphantly, "Never! Not once, Mr. Hand! Not once in thirty years! If you go back through the files of this establishment, you'll find it hasn't happened more than once in the past 150 years. Thousands of Z-level proabilities and only one

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conversion into alpha. Only one." He picked up the print-out and tossed it back towards Hand. "Go and pop something, Mr. Hand. You're letting your work get on top of you."

Hand leaned forward, scowling. "I am not letting my work get on top of me, Dr. Sebelious. Have you any conception of the amount of information that went into the computers to produce Z-level? Historical records, mythology, rock data. Item after item. Information unit after information unit." He sighed suddenly and his anger subsided. "Have you any idea what it really means if the thing comes back?"

"Of course I have!" Sebelious snapped shortly. "It means the end of the world." He tapped absently on his desk with his antique pencil. "More or less."

THREE

Larsson felt curiously uncomfortable. He felt it might simply be the cold and adjusted the heating unit of his suit upwards, but it wasn't the cold really. He watched the power sleighs circling round the base of the glacier as the grab trundled forward slowly on caterpillar treads.

A pale sun hung like a brazen pearl, casting long, hard shadows.

"I feel very uneasy somehow," Larsson said.

Bergen, monstrous in his heatsuit, glanced across. "That's only because you're not wearing a helmet."

Helmet? Larsson frowned. "Why should I be wearing a helmet? I don't understand you."

"You've been on the Moon, haven't you?" Bergen asked.

Larsson nodded. "Not recently, but —"

"This place feels like the Moon," Bergen said. "It's cold and there's the same stark quality about the light, the same hard black shadows. Anybody who's been to the Moon always thinks they're back there when they come here." He grinned. "Unconsciously they think they should be wearing a helmet." The grin broadened. "One or two even develop asthma for a time before they adjust."

"Good God!" Larsson said.

The grab lined up within easy striking distance, and the sleighs stopped. The mammoth in the glacier showed up as a dark undifferentiated blob, like a stain in the snow. Men in bright orange heatsuits left the sleighs carrying crates which contained the laser cutters. The power packs were already lying in the snow beside the south face of the glacier, marked by flags.

"Doesn't it bother you?" Larsson asked. "Or have you gotten used to it?"

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Bergen shrugged. "I'd have adjusted by now. But as it happens, I've never been off planet and so the problem didn't arise. All that worries me is the bloody cold."

"Yes," Larsson agreed, and shivered.

After a moment, he said, "I suppose we'd better move in closer before they get those damn ray guns assembled. Somebody has to make sure they don't burn each other's heads off."

"Mmm," Bergen grunted. It must have signified agreement, for he moved off towards his personal power sleigh.

As they moved off across the snow, Larsson called above the whine of the wind, "I hate these things."

"Power sleighs? Why's that?"

"Mainly the rotten suspension. I'm not as well padded as you."

Bergen grinned. "At least they never break down." It was almost true.

I am not on the Moon, Larsson said to himself. *I am not on the Moon. I am not on the Moon.* The desolate landscape sped past him, separated from the air cocoon within the sleigh by a hissing wall of sound. Maybe Bergen was right: he did feel less uneasy after telling himself he wasn't on the Moon. At the same time, a degree of unease persisted, clinging to the outer limits of awareness. Perhaps the feeling had more than one cause. Perhaps he was worried that the expedition would not justify itself economically. It was perfectly possible, even if nothing went wrong: examination of the mammoth might produce too little new information to justify the expense.

He was painfully aware who would be carrying the can if that happened.

He sighed.

Bergen caught the sound. "Something disturbing you?"

"To tell you the truth," Larsson said, "I was just wondering if it was going to be worth all the fuss."

"It should be," Bergen said. "Not every day you find a mammoth."

They reached the area beneath the south face. Bergen cut back the power to allow them to drive right in without disturbing the workmen. They pinned up their namebands — individual recognition was very difficult in a heatsuit — and climbed down. Courtney was supervising, his grating voice making his nameband superfluous.

"How's it going?" Bergen asked him when they went over.

"According to plan, yes." He was a very nervous individual, seldom able to remain still for long. His eyes darted above the yashmak of the heatsuit headgear.

"How long before the lasers are assembled?" Larsson asked.

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Courtney shrugged. "Say three quarters of an hour. Perhaps nothing goes wrong. Three quarters of an hour, yes."

"Can we begin cutting immediately?" Larsson pressed.

"Why not?" Courtney shrugged again. "Soon we have damn fine big ice cube ready for the grab."

"Wish I had a whiskey big enough to put it in," Bergen murmured and the three men grinned.

FOUR

They moved through an iron gateway into the mansion gardens. The gardens had been laid down more than two centuries ago and were, consequently, charming but unkempt. The pathways were not designed for robot labor, and enough human labor was too costly, even for someone in Copek's position.

But the place was full of exotic sights and scents. What labor there was, light robot and human, did its best. The paths were clear, and several of the bowers at least were as well looked after as they had been in the days of Queen Elizabeth.

They passed through an ornamental archway and walked onto a lawn surrounding a tiny rose maze with a sundial in the center. There was a table set with glasses, ice buckets, several bottles. One of the new miniature robot servers floated nearby.

"Ahh," Copek said with feeling.

"Ah, indeed," Sebelious echoed. They walked together to the table. Copek punched a combination and the server mixed the drinks.

"So," Copek said, while they were waiting.

"So, indeed," Sebelious said, echoing again.

"And you are worried?" Copek asked.

"I am very worried," Sebelious said. All sense of irritation had disappeared. They were two men who had known one another for a very long time.

"Perhaps," suggested Copek, "you would go over the situation briefly once more, to make sure I have missed nothing, understood everything."

The server poured the drinks through a retractable spout. It was an action so reminiscent of micturition that it would almost certainly have to be modified on later models.

"I suppose to make it really simple," Sebelious said with a vague expression on his face, "I could break it down like this: the department has evidence that seems to point to the fact that a comet — one we haven't known about — makes a periodic close approach to Earth. It must be on

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an exceptionally wide orbit because there are several thousand years between approaches. It seems to be a big comet: planet size, in fact. It seems to have passed so close to Earth in the past that it caused quite unimaginable destruction." He sipped his drink. "What excellent cocktails that little robot makes."

"Yes, doesn't it?" Copek agreed. He sipped his own, nodding in the sunshine.

"We worked out a computerized scenario on all this in the early days," Sebelious went on. "Given planet-sized mass and close approach, the damage done to poor old Earth is quite appalling. Reversal of global spin: slows down, stops, reverses. Reversal of the magnetic poles. Some pretty extreme interference with gravity. Perhaps we could sit down? Talking of catastrophe always makes me feel my age."

"Yes, dear boy, yes, of course." He punched another combination and robots appeared with folding chairs. They sat down with their drinks.

"Well," said Sebelious, "you can imagine the result of that sort of thing. Tidal waves, giant earthquakes, massive volcanic activity, tornadoes, storms, and God knows what else. All on a planetary scale. Wherever you went, nothing but noise, smoke, fire, water and destruction. Dreadful." He shook his head from side to side, as if comtemplating the follies of youth. "You would have incredible changes of temperature. The tropics would freeze; the arctics would melt. The mountains would sink, and the valleys would rise, as the old prophets used to say: literally true." He sipped his drink gravely for a moment, then smiled suddenly. "But this is all supposition. *Suppose* a planet-sized comet made a close enough approach, then such and such would follow. It would mean the end of any dominant culture, incidentally, although life would probably survive, with any real degree of luck. But the frightening thing is it would all happen in a matter of hours: days at the most."

"Fascinating," Copek murmured.

"If it's true," Sebelious reminded him.

They sipped their drinks in silence for a moment. Eventually Copek said, "What sort of evidence has given you a Z-level probability?"

Sebelious shrugged. "Quite a mixture. Paleomagnetism, for instance. Different rock strata do show different magnetic polarization. We've wondered about it since the nineteen hundreds. The only answer that makes any sense is periodic changes in the actual

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magnetic poles. Then there are the aquatic fossils on mountain tops: you find them all over the world. So the seas were once above those mountains, one way or another." He waved a hand. "That sort of thing."

"You're giving me evidence of change, not catastrophe," Copek said. "These things could have happened slowly, over a few million years each time."

Sebelious shrugged again. "As I say, it's only a Z-level probability."

Bees hummed. It was an unusual sound outside the Copek demesne, but here hives had been stocked by importation, maintained through selective breeding.

"We've come across some written references to the planet reversing its spin," Sebelious said.

"Written references?" For the first time Copek seemed genuinely taken aback. "You mean we've had a cometary pass in historical times?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. If I mean anything at all."

Copek stared at him. "What sort of references?"

"The Book of Joshua, for instance. 'So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven and hasted not to go down about a whole day.' Joshua was chasing the Canaanite kings at the time."

Copek's eyes had narrowed marginally. "But that isn't meant to be taken literally, is it?"

"So we've always assumed. But it's not the only reference to the sun standing still. And if the sun really did stand still, the only thing that would account for it would be something interfering with the rotation of the Earth."

"Quite," said Copek.

Surprisingly, Sebelious giggled. "It's the sort of research that tends to leave you slightly cracked. I expect that's what's been happening to us all in the department. Certainly poor old Hand's quite cracked. The Z-level probability has frightened the life out of him." His face, quite suddenly, grew sober. "Of course, the probability includes the prediction that the comet is on the way back, and so we're in for another shake-up in the not-too-distant future. That really is a frightening possibility — Z-level or not."

"So Mr. Hand is cracking and Dr. Sebelious is worried."

"Dr. Sebelious is worried."

"You didn't let Mr. Hand know that, did you?" Copek asked.

"I did not. It would be a very bad thing to allow rumors of the end of the world to come out of the department. I convinced him he was worrying unnecessarily. He doesn't like me any better for that."

In the stillness of the afternoon, Copek asked, "Is he worrying unnecessarily?"

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Sebelious looked at him. "I don't know. We have one certainty: there have been periodic changes in this planet in the past. We don't know if they were gradual or sudden, peaceful or catastropic. The unit of information the computers need is proof that the changes were sudden. Until it gets that, I suppose all of us are worrying unnecessarily."

He sighed. "But that doesn't really stop me worrying."

FIVE

The winches on the *Compton* gave out a grating, high-pitched whine as they struggled with the mammoth ice cube. Larsson watched impassively. With no holdups so far, the operation was probably running within economic schedule.

"You should have fun with that thing when you get it home, eh?" Bergen grinned. He was mightily pleased with himself; his name was on the expedition even though Larsson had temporarily taken over. The unusual find would make his name, not Larsson's.

"Yes," Larsson agreed. He felt curiously subdued.

"Must be unique, wouldn't you say?" Bergen asked. "Who could have found anything like that before?"

Afraid of appearing antisocial, Larsson pulled himself together. "Actually I've been making a few inquiries, and it doesn't seem we *are* the first. There's a very old record of somebody finding a mammoth frozen in Siberia. Preserved like this one in ice. Quite fresh — they served the meat to the huskies, and it didn't do them any harm."

An uncomfortable expression crossed Bergen's face. "What are huskies — natives?"

"Dogs," Larsson said, grinning.

The ship was tilting slightly, but the winches were taking the strain well enough. In a moment the block swung clear. It hung poised above the deep refrigerated hold, then slid slowly down to vanish in the depths. Larsson sighed and realized for the first time he had been holding his breath. He turned to Bergen and smiled broadly. It was all over now except for shipping home.

"Nobody took the record very seriously," he said. "But I expect they'll have to now we've discovered the same thing."

As they walked towards the gangplank, Bergen asked, "Why wasn't it taken seriously? When was the Siberian mammoth found, by the way?"

"Oh, hundreds of years ago. I forget really. Eighteen hundred or 1799 — something like that. It wasn't taken seriously because it sounded too much like romantic fiction — the sort of thing they

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liked to make up in those days. Besides, there were some parts of the story that seemed impossible. The sort of thing you'd expect a fiction writer to put in if he hadn't thought out all the implications."

The journey home would take five weeks. He was purposely proposing to accompany the mammoth on the ship rather than flying. It satisfied his sense of the dramatic.

"I beg your pardon?" he asked Bergen who had said something.

"I was asking you what the implications were."

Larsson shrugged. "Well, it's all very fine saying you've found a mammoth frozen in the Siberian tundra. I mean, we know that cold as extreme as that will preserve things almost indefinitely, and so the story was fine so far as that went. But mammoths couldn't live in Siberia. They eat grass and vegetation like elephants, and there just isn't enough to support them. Nowadays, that is. So you're left with the implication that the area of Siberia wasn't always frozen tundra."

"I buy that," Bergen said. "World climate changes."

"Fine. You simply conclude the climate of Siberia changed from the time the mammoths lived there. But where the story breaks down completely —" He stopped suddenly, a curiously glassy expression creeping into his eyes. "Where it *seemed* to break down —" And there was something a little like awe in his voice now, as if new implications were dawning. "— was when you started to wonder how your mammoth got himself frozen."

"Simple enough," Bergen said. "The Ice Age came along and —" He stopped. He was not a fool, and the implications had suddenly dawned on him too.

"It couldn't have, could it?" Larsson asked almost helplessly. "Not then with the Siberian mammoth and not now with our mammoth. They're tropical beasts. By the time the ice replaced the tropical environment, they'd have been long dead and putrefied. You'd have had nothing left to freeze but bones. To get a mammoth into a block of ice like that, the climate would literally have had to change overnight." He started at Bergen. "It would take something pretty damn extreme to cause that!"

Bergen laughed. "Looks like we're shipping a real puzzle back," he said.

Larsson nodded thoughtfully, then walked up the gangplank and into the ship.

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A short and surprising chiller from Sterling Lanier, whose novel, HIERO'S JOURNEY was recently published by Chilton.

...No Traveler Returns

by STERLING E. LANIER

Colonel Morehouse held up his handkerchief again. The odor of the rubbing alcohol in which he had soaked it came over the foul reek from the great open pit like a cleaner breath of air. His fleshy, red face was unshaven, and the dark pouches under his eyes betrayed lack of sleep and also strain.

"The governor is sending more men if we need them. But I have the whole town tightly cordoned off. The population is only three hundred or so; so that should be enough."

"We moved quick for once." Naylor, the State Police captain, looked equally tired, but his immaculate uniform had not bagged, and though he also was unshaven, it hardly showed. He looked with some degree of sardonic sympathy at the National Guard officer. Morehouse was a civilian, a political appointee, and he was very close to shock.

"If you won't get some rest, at least get a gas mask. There's no need to put yourself through this."

"No." The heavy head shook stubbornly. "I have to see, and you can't see through one of those, at least not well. I can stand it."

Naylor returned to his inspection of the huge hole. Fresh clouds of purulent foulness eddied from it as more bodies were brought out by the masked and goggled police. Naylor simply forced himself to breathe through his mouth, by an exercise of iron will. The dust of the broken road eddied and sifted around them in the hot Midwestern sunlight. The shattered fragments of tar lay about them in heaps, spilling over into the roadside ditches, some of it hurled as far as the near wire fence rows.

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Somewhere in the tall town, meadowlarks called and piped, notes of heart-rending bittersweet.

The pit was now over thirty feet across. The men seemed to have come to an end of the excavation and had reached untouched earth on all the perimeters. But they were still digging straight down.

"Count's now thirty-two." Lieutenant Vardaman towered over his lean superior. His voice was muffled since he wore a gas mask, but the modified Afro haircut was unrestrained by any cap. The long, slender dark-brown fingers interlaced as he spoke, the only sign of tension. "Come and look at the rest of this stuff. I still can't believe it."

The two older men followed him to a small pile of curious utensils. There were small pickaxes, battered entrenching tools and short-handled shovels; all were rusty, but some were smeared with fresher stains, darker and heavier stains.

"Looks like the kind of thing you buy at a surplus store," said Morehouse through his handkerchief. "We had shovels like that when I was just a kid in the Korean War. Haven't seen any for years, though."

"The picks were traditional, but the shovels and entrenching tools are a modern adaption." The dry, uninflected voice came from behind them, and they all jumped a little.

"You must be Professor Alietti," said Naylor, his mind clicking over with an effort. "You got here fast, all the way from State."

The small, round academic looked around with keen interest before answering. The incredible, sickening stench seemed to have no effect on him at all.

"The governor sent a plane after he spoke with me on the phone. This is incredible, of course, but, perhaps not, well — *surprising*. But still to borrow an archaic thing like this, almost two hundred years old. Fantastic!" There was a note of professional relish in the newcomer's tones which the others found unpleasant.

Naylor pointed to the distant town, whose clustered buildings reflected the sun back over the flat landscape. Only the acres of corn, silent and high in the noon heat, lay between them and the distant hamlet. A man cursed as his foot slipped on something unspeakable at the edge of the charnel pit.

"The clues are over there." The captain fell silent for a moment. "We'll have to dig them out. Just like we dug this out. They all are in it. They none of them are going to get off, except maybe the small kids. We'll get the answers."

Alietti looked curiously at him. "May I ask what gave you your first clues? I gathered from the governor that this is your work, this whole

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thing, the fact that it was uncovered at all, I mean."

Naylor said, "It was a lot of little things, like most police work. It started with a ring of professional car thieves fighting over territories. Someone was undercutting them in this area, underselling them. The syndicate had money in it. They sent people to look around. Some didn't come back. The syndicate smelled something badly wrong and got out of the whole thing. They don't much go for new ideas, or mysteries either. But we heard about it. That was one piece." He watched the line of men who were still carrying nameless things up from the great hole and laying them gently on the side, extending the lines of shapeless objects, all covered in plastic, to yet further on down the road. It was obvious, sickeningly so, that they were no longer finding bodies, but rather fragments.

"Disappearances were still another thing. All kinds of people, not who were *known* to have been here, but who *could* have been here or passing through. The F.B.I. has charts and graphs, and so do we. I began to play with them, and a kind of vague blob appeared. This county and two around it on the east and west." Vardaman left them and went back to the hole where he could supervise. The sound of careful digging still came from the bottom. The men were silent, the enormity of what they were uncovering reducing them to a perspiring quiet, broken only by a muffled curse and the shovel noises audible at close range. Over all, the piercing tremolo of the larks rose on the hot air of the prairie, uncaring and rapturous.

"The next clue came from the churches, a place I'd never have looked. No minister of any denomination ever asked here to perform marriages or to bury anyone. The churches demolished and used as building sites. No church records newer than twenty years of this town at all. Vardaman found that out while he was investigating. Since the churches, even the Protestant ones, don't liaison much with one another, not one of them noticed that it alone was not the only brand that had left town." A man ran up the ladder on the far side of the hole and ripped off his gas mask. He went off to the side of the road, well away from the hole and vomited. The sounds came clearly to the little group who were listening to Naylor. Nobody reprimanded the man, a state patrolman, or tried to bring him back. He sat down after a while with his head in his hands.

"We'll all have a few nightmares," mused the captain, half to himself. "Let's see, what came next? Well, there was money, lots

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of it, moving in the wrong ways for this area. This is conservative country. People don't play the stock market here, or have Swiss bank accounts. That was a weak point in their planning, though they tried to be clever. They were awfully damn clever about the cars. With the two legitimate garages to change the bodies and repaint, file off engine-block numbers and so on, those cars just like to vanished. We still have only a very few traced, mostly to Mexico. But the idea of the local banker *and* the local nail factory owner *and* the fellows that owned the garages all having Swiss bank accounts, that was bad. Treasury gave us some help there. Then there was the law situation."

He spat. A bad cop is anathema to a good one. A cop involved in this sort of thing was unthinkable, awful, a terrible affront to the concept of the law. The law officers involved were people whom Naylor really hated.

He went on. "*Never* any crime here, beyond reports, second-hand from the town police and the justice, a chicken stealing and kids being wild. That was another mistake, and it helped eliminate the other places we were watching. Every town has major crimes once in a while, usually an occasional murder, or homicide of some kind, never mind the actual cause. Yet this place never had anything but the piddling stuff, and it was always settled here without trial, or at least nothing beyond the J.P. That was a pointer. I'm a little surprised that they thought they could get away with that, surprised no one had any more psychology than that."

"They got away with it for twenty years, from the looks of things," mumbled Morehouse through his handkerchief. "Suppose they decided they'd had enough last year and quit? Where would we be then?"

They all came alert. The sound of a distant series of shots came faint and far off from over the fields. In a moment, a young lieutenant, masked like all the rest, sprinted over from his command jeep parked up the road. He saluted the colonel, who waved irritably in answer, still holding the cloth to his nose, and choked out the word, "Report."

"Two of them tried through the cornfields north of town, sir. The heat sensors picked them up, and the machine gunners got them. Both adult males." At a nod, he returned to his radio watch.

Naylor silently revised some ideas. The paunchy colonel seemed to have an adequate capability for his task. He resumed his story.

"We took the whole story to the governor, in secret. We had enough proof to convince him but the attorney general wanted even more.

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So we sent in a decoy family. Father, mother, two grown kids and all police, our people. In a trailer van, because they said they were vaguely moving to California, site and time of arrival uncertain. They were volunteers. Oh boy, what a nice friendly town! But the thing was, when you knew what was going on, it was so obvious that it made your skin crawl. The fake smiles, the mockery, the sly grins, the kindly questions. I was the 'father,'" he added, "so I know what I'm talking about.

"They rushed us at dusk. We had dummies sitting around the trailer door, and we were inside. The trailer was armored. We stood them off, and the helicopters came in with the sleep gas in minutes. Your people were ringing the town at the same time. That's all. We woke up a teen-ager and asked a few questions. He sent us to here." He nodded at the mass grave. The things being brought up now were all very small.

Alietti stared at the ground for a moment. Then he looked at Naylor. "Have you found anything religious in nature, any of what we anthropologists call cult objects? If the parallel is an exact one, these people simply could not stop what they were doing. The profit motive became a minor one, whatever it had been in the beginning. The lust of killing, the service of Death itself, under one guise or another, that becomes the paramount, the overpowering desire. At least that is the pathology of the thing in other cases. Sleeman stamped it out so quickly in India during the 1840's that a lot of documentation is missing."

"Too bad," said Colonel Morehouse in a nasty tone. "He should have left it alone so you could study it better." He turned and stalked off to his staff car.

A sergeant from the police radio car brought Naylor a written flimsy. He studied it and handed it to the scholar without comment. Alietti read and handed it back.

"I'm not surprised, captain. That makes three of these graves. You'll have to check every one of the roads. And even then you won't be sure. But I have another question. Have you any reason to believe that in this crowded, mobile and individualistic country, that this is the only situation of its kind?"

"We've recommended that the Justice Department set up a special study on it. Beyond that, it's too big for us. This almost was." Naylor's voice was weary.

The two men looked at the distant heat-shrouded town and listened to the meadowlarks caroling. Their piping rose and fell in the heat, like the piping of the temple flautists in ancient temples

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on the far side of the globe. It is such piping which rises to the eight-armed thing who is Sitala, who is Durga, who is Kali, the goddess-demon of the oldest murders in the world, the Thugs.

Formerly of India.

Coming next month

- **ASIMOV** - "—That Thou Art Mindful of Him!" a gripping new novelet by Isaac Asimov, a story that may well be the last in Asimov's famous positronic robot series, a story that extrapolates the theme of robots and androids to a stunning new level.

- **DEL REY** - "The Dawn Rider," a story by Lester del Rey, a rich new rendering of a battle between sun and moon cults.

- **ELLISON** - Robert Bloch has called Harlan Ellison "the only living organism I know whose natural habitat is hot water." Next month, Ellison more than makes up for this month's absence of "Books" with a major and controversial book review-essay on the state of science fiction today, guaranteed to have at least half our readers sharpening their teeth.

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FRANKENSTEIN *REDUX*

When I first heard that there was to be yet *another* two-part TV adaptation of Mary Shelley's most famous novel (one wonders what the work's standing would be these days without the various films based on it), I literally thought, "They must be kidding!" How, I wondered, would anyone bring anything new to this oft-mangled novel? Last year's production didn't really offer too much except a literary sensibility and a tour-de-force performance by Bo Svenson. Why on Earth do another one?

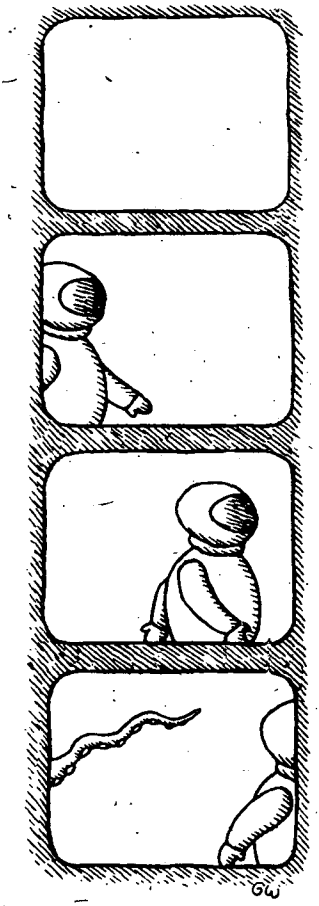
I cheered up considerably when I got a look at the cast and learned that the script had been co-authored by Christopher Isherwood, perhaps the only one of the literary lions of the century that I ever really enjoyed reading. And the results, as shown on NBC, were terrifically interesting. This may not have been the definitive *Frankenstein*, but it will do handily until something better comes along.

Now I haven't read the novel for many a year* so I can't play the game of just how true the adaptation is. On the whole, I think

**I like very much Brian Aldiss' thesis, in his "Billion Year Spree", of Frankenstein as the first s/f novel, a sort of mutant child of the Gothics.*

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



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this is for the best. The film has its own rules and esthetics as a medium; and this column is hopefully devoted to questioning the merits of films on their own. My major criticism is that the dramatization spread over two evenings as it was, was a bit too diffuse; there were several climaxes and some longish in-between stretches. However, TV may be developing a form of its own based on the success of the BBC serializations of literature, i. e. narratives more akin to the novel, without the incisive shape of the movie-movie as we have known it. The 19th-century novel, with its sprawling form, lends itself to this sort of thing very well, and I may simply be judging by old standards. In any case, there is so much here that's memorable that I don't quite know where to start.

In brief, the plot as presented concerns young Victor Frankenstein, a medical student with the best of instincts and a searching mind (and a beautiful fiancee). He first becomes the protege of a Dr. Clerval, also basically decent but monomanaically devoted to creating life. He dies before the great experiment; Victor uses Clerval's brain and completes the work, bringing to life a strikingly handsome youth (the resemblance between the creature and Victor is not coincidence); his first word (echoing Victor) is "beautiful." Tragically, the creature deteriorates; Victor, guilt-ridden, does not stop him from destroying himself and does not know of his failure to do so. Enter another scientist, Polidori, who specializes in "mentalism" (a basic dichotomy in Victorian thinking; the physical sciences, of course, won out). Polidori, who now has the creature, forces Victor to help him create a woman, who is a total success; she is exquisitely beautiful and completely amoral. Prima is even introduced into Victor's household (he is now married). At a stunningly produced Regency ball, where Prima is to begin her conquest of society (with Polidor manipulating her acquisition of power), the creature, now a travesty of humanity, enters as Prima is dancing alone and rips her head from her shoulders. Victor and his wife flee to America, but the creature and Polidori are both aboard ship, and the film ends in the surrealist wastes of the Arctic with a final encounter between Victor and his creation.

There is much intelligence at work here. For example, Victor himself is a "creature," first of Clerval's, then of Polidori's. And, in a different way, the period excesses of the novel have been maintained; the incredible Polar finale echoes (or presages — my

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literary chronology isn't strong) Poe and Coleridge.

For me, the best part of it all was visual — I realized how starved I'd been for visual beauty in the horror films of the past 25 years; it's been a neglected aspect since the Caligari-influenced 30s. The creation of Prima was a knockout; standing nude upright in a fluid filled vat, great bubbles of vivid color rising around her and her hair floating in the currents of the liquid, it was the closest the screen has ever come to a Virgil Finlay drawing. In another scene, Victor's fiancee is horrified by a butterfly he has brought back to life; she shrinks from the fluttering creature (there is a famous Hannes Bok drawing of a girl's head, her face horror struck; the only other thing in the drawing is a butterfly), and eventually crushes it with a book.

I'm sure *Frankenstein: the True Story* (the unweildy title of this version) will be repeated. I urge watching it; in the meantime, the script has been published in an Avon paperback.

This has been a good month on the tube; I wanted to go into some detail about "Catholics," the TV adaptation of Brian Moore's mainstream novel about the future of the Church, but have no room for the complex questions it raises, not only as provocative drama, but as a fascinating study in how a mainstream writer tackles a science-fictional theme. And I wanted to devote some space to a re-viewing of the film of "The 10th Victim" (Sheckley, by the way, is probably the most sought after out-of-print writer in America) and how its elements that were considered s/f satire at the time have become reality. But no room, no room, as Harry Harrison put it, and it's nice to have too much to talk about rather than not enough.

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A first rate story from a new writer (four published stories). M. (Miriam) R. Anver writes: "Material for some of my stories — and definitely for part of UUAC — is gleaned from a biomedical background, as I have doctor's degrees both in veterinary medicine and pathology. Currently I am an assistant professor on the medical faculty at the University of Michigan."

Unto Us A Child

by M. R. ANVER

A haze of smoke, the greasy smell of institution food, the pallid, lifeless color of skin beneath lumoglobes, a monotonous buzz of voices occasionally overridden by high-pitched bleeps of electronic pages.

"All meat inspectors to the line," Dr. Len Feldman muttered. He took a sip of coffee, choked and pushed the cup aside. Too bitter to drink this morning, even if he hadn't felt like vomiting. He scowled down at a lumpy roll on the plate in front of him and wondered, with a mind fuzzy from lack of sleep, if the next eight hours would ever pass. Or would he be stuck here forever, waiting with sick anticipation?

Reaching into his pocket, he took out a letter folded and wrinkled from weeks of handling. Words scrawled across the paper were a strange mixture of denunciation and scream of anguish. They were unanswerable, even if the sender had given her return address. But today he might have tried.

"Offer a chair to a tired, overworked nurse, Dr. Feldman?"

Feldman looked up at a dark-haired girl standing next to his table. He smiled slowly, grateful for the distraction, and crumpled the letter into a ball. "Tired with the regular hours you O.R. chicks keep?" he asked.

Sandi Perez's brown eyes widened ingenuously and she sat down with a sinuous movement. "Maybe our hours are regular, but a girl can't stay home alone. I may switch to an evening shift."

Feldman's rejoinder was automatic. "Somehow I had an idea your evenings were occupied."

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With an effort, he managed a suggestive leer.

Sandi pouted. "Not occupied lately. Not the last three nights, to be specific."

"Have a heart, nurse. Pediatrics residents can't pick the times they're on call. But tonight, better not make any other plans..." Feldman's brooding expression returned. "Provided I make it through today."

"I expect you will." Sandi absently picked up a salt shaker and turned it over, sprinkling white grains on the plastic table top. "Lenny, I've been thinking —"

Feldman grimaced, reminded of his own thoughts. "Don't do that, love," he said, trying to keep it light. "No fun having a cerebral bed partner."

Sandi flicked some salt into his coffee. "As a matter of fact, bed's just what was on my mind."

"Ah. All right, in that case. A little anticipcation helps." He reached for her knee under the table, but she swiveled sideways. adroitly.

"Len, will you be serious for a minute?"

"No."

An indulgent smile. "Len..."

"Come on. A healthy boy has to have some diversion," Feldman protested, not wanting to dam his manic flow of words. "Hey, tell me, what you have been up to during my three-night exile?"

"I visited my father yesterday."

"Oh, yeah? How is he?"

"He's still at the relocation center. He...it doesn't look like he's going to get out. He's old, you know. His last application for alternative housing was turned down."

"That's too bad, Sandi."

The girl twined her fingers together and rested her chin on her hands, staring directly at Feldman. "He told me rationing is getting tight there. Very tight."

"Look at the crap they serve here. It's tight for everyone."

"Not everyone, as *you* well know. I'm surprised you don't catch more of your meals in the obstetrics ward like the other residents."

Feldman shifted his weight uneasily and forced down a bite of his tasteless roll. "You told me you were thinking about bed," he accused, veering away from painful topics.

"I was. I am." Sandi hesitated, chewed on her lower lip for a moment, then blurted, "Len, I want to get pregnant." Feldman stiffened but she hurried on, running her words together. "I'm not saying anything about marriage, there won't be any obligation, I know about residents' salaries and how little time you have, so that's not on my mind at all. Still, we can conceive a child —"

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"*Jesus Christ!*" Feldman clamped his hands on the edge of the table, going hot, then cold, trembling with the effort to control his anger, to avoid creating a scene in the middle of the cafeteria. Why in hell couldn't she leave well enough alone? Why did she have to sound exactly like Laura with the same destructive, mindless demand? "Sell your ova for a few pieces of silver, right? My God, you're an R.N., not some tenement slut who doesn't give a damn what happens at the end of nine months."

Sandi's lips quivered. "I *do* care what happens. But I still want a child because —"

"Because of the goddamned subsidy. What you really want is to fix up your room, buy new clothes, maybe even toss a pittance to your father."

Sandi's distress flared into an anger to match his. "Stop it! How do *you* know what I want?"

"A child. Sure. Well, skip gestation, just go to the side show. We've got any kind you'd like in the nursery. Pick a choice freak from our collection. Pick —"

"Don't! They're not all like that."

"Of course not. Only a small number — like two thirds. But hell, don't let that deter you. You can sit at home with your incentive money."

"Conception is a normal process, you're sick, and I'm not going to listen to you any more." Sandi started to get up, but Feldman caught her wrist and jerked her back down into the chair.

"Yes, you are. If you want a kid — plus all those juicy government benefits — you go out on the street and screw the first man that looks at you sideways. Neither of *you* will be in the ward when the Committee comes."

"Len, of course I've seen the ward. I know we'll be taking a chance, but we should take it. People must, or there won't be anyone left. And we're all right." She was almost pleading with him. "The baby might be —"

Laura's words, driving him to the brink of screaming frustration. "You've had enough genetics to know that's no bloody guarantee. Don't you think the parents of those kids downstairs are 'all right'? Don't you think that's what *they* hoped? The 'mights,' the 'maybes' — they're the reason the Committee's going to have a busy morning — and so am I."

"Oh." Sandi dropped her gaze, stopped trying to pull free. She looked very vulnerable, and Feldman released her wrist. "I didn't know the Committe would be here today," she said, her voice barely audible.

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"That dosn't make any difference." Feldman leaned back in his chair, drained. "Even if you caught me at a...better time, I'd still feel the same way because... I would."

Sandi stood up, pushing a stray wisp of hair beneath her cap. "I've got to go back on duty." She turned away, then paused. "Len?"

Feldman kept his eyes on his half-eaten roll and didn't respond. When he finally lifted his head, Sandi was gone, lost in the anonymity of white uniforms in the cavernous room.

If only she hadn't cornered him and forced him to smash his way out. Oh God, if only Laura hadn't. Feldman sighed. He picked up the wad of paper that had been Laura's letter and dropped it into an ashtray. Then, glancing at a wall clock, he scraped his chair back.

Time.

In a few minutes, the Committee was scheduled to arrive at the front entrance. Downstairs in the ward, the intern would be yelling at nurses, nurses at orderlies, chaos and confusion before the big event. At least residents had the privilege of coming late enough to miss most of the preparations.

Feldman plodded out of the room to an elevator. He was the only passenger as he started it downward, but at the first subbasement he was joined by a contingent of sophomore medical students clutching their notebooks, talking and laughing too shrilly. They eyed his uniform and name tag covetously; at the fourth sub they moved aside to let him out, then trailed him down the hall, footsteps scuffling on the tiles. Their eager patter made him knot his hands into fists.

He snapped, "Gowns and masks before you enter." Without looking back he jerked his head toward the nurse's desk. As the students jostled each other to comply with his order, he selected a mask and sterile gown from a dressing room next to the nursery. Suitably dressed, he went inside, into bedlam.

Disturbed by the pre-Committee activity, every child — ages one week to one month — was wailing. Feldman normally ignored the sound, but today he cringed involuntarily as his gaze darted around the ward. Shiny chrome, burnished floors, fresh bedding, meticulous, aseptic. Two nurses were arranging vials into symmetrical rows on a cart while Tyson, the pediatric intern, stood in one corner talking desultorily to Heller, the pathology resident. Both men waved in greeting.

Feldman knew they expected him to join them, but before they could wonder why he didn't, the nursery doors opened. The chief of

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pediatrics came striding in, light gleaming off his thick glasses. He was followed by a hospital pathologist and three strangers: two men and a woman. Representatives of the Certification Committee, Feldman thought, his belly muscles tightening.

"...is Dr. Elving, Pediatric Medicine; Dr. Spirin, Pathology; Dr. Arnett, Eugenics." The chief shouted introductions over the incessant crying of the babies and the sophomore students' clumping entrance.

"Let's begin, gentlemen,' the Committee pathologist said. "We're on a tight schedule."

The pediatrics chief nodded. "We'll start with 86-93. Dr. Feldman, will you discuss the case?" He gestured almost imperceptibly toward the avidly listening students, indicating a teaching session was in order.

Feldman struggled with a spasm of nausea. He swallowed, mastered it and went to one of the cribs. He should have dragged Laura here, shoved her face in it. She wasn't like Sandi. If Laura had *seen*, she wouldn't have urged him, pressured him, persisted —

"Feldman," the chief prompted.

Feldman looked down at the baby, a tiny red-haired girl with a large pulsating swelling on the lower part of her neck. "This is an ectopia cordis," he said tonelessly. "The heart didn't descend into the chest during the embryo's development and is located, as you see here, superior to the thoracic inlet. There's a circulatory disturbance associated with this condition, as well as interference with deglutition — swallowing — and pressure on the trachea —"

The Committee pathologist cut him off with a peremptory flick of one hand. He beckoned to a nurse who stepped forward quickly. With a felt-tipped pen she drew a vertical red line on the child's forehead.

The group moved ponderously after Feldman to the next crib where a chubby, dark-skinned boy waved fists in the air as he cried vigorously. Feldman pointed to an extra deformed arm; the limb grew incongruously from the top of the baby's left shoulder. "Brachial dimelia, a parasitic appendage. Otherwise, the child is structurally normal."

"No associated skeletal defects?" the Committee pediatrician inquired.

"None. I have radiographs to confirm —"

The eugenicist, Arnett, selected a photograph from the child's records. "Karyotype analysis —" she held up the picture so the medical students could see a many-times magnified chromosome preparation — "shows that

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there is an extra sex chromosome. Instead of being a normal XY male, this boy is XXY. The condition is called Klinefelter's syndrome. Even though the genitalia are grossly normal, there are associated testicular abnormalities, specifically aspermia. Sterility. I recommend —"

Feldman's jaw muscles began to ache. He was clenching his teeth; he desperately tried to relax, to blank his mind as he listened to the expected recommendation. "The next case," he continued, walking away while the nurse touched the baby's forehead, "is 73-93, an incomplete twinning."

When rounds finally ended, Feldman was soaked with cold sweat, sodden shirt beneath his gown plastered to his skin. He leaned against one wall, half listening as a Committee member, with a surreptitious glance at his watch, stepped forward to give the required lecture.

Heller, the pathology resident, sidled up next to Feldman. "They're the best team I've seen, but they've marked over half of the damn kids in here." he moaned in Feldman's ear. "I'll *never* get home tonight. Finish as fast as you can, okay, old buddy?"

"Yeah."

"Good man, Len." Heller poked him in the ribs and unobtrusively edged out of the room just as the lecture concluded. Escorted by the pediatrics chief, the Committee members also left, on their way to another hospital; they paused briefly by Feldman, thanking him for the concise presentations. He watched them exit, then turned to the students.

The sophomores lingered, bright-eyed, spectators at a circus waiting for the next act. Feldman said harshly, "Everyone out. Now."

The students mumbled protest but finally straggled out into the hallway. The door closed behind the last of them, the babies' cries tapered off, and abruptly the room was quiet. Feldman clamped gloves hands together and wet his dry lips. "You've done venipunctures on children this age," he told the intern, his strained, cracking voice belonging to someone else.

"We'll inject into the jugular vein," Feldman continued. "The dose is one cc. per ten pounds of body weight. Use two cc's, which will cover the entire weight range we have in here. I...I'll demonstrate on...on one..."

"Len, are you all right?"

Feldman waved him off. "I'll demonstrate on one child, 102-93. Then, we'll split the room between us." He watched as a nurse drew greenish fluid from a large bottle into a disposable syringe, then walked to a crib.

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The Teratologic Certification Committee member had directed his lecture primarily at the spellbound med students. He said, "Every child before it reaches the age of one month is examined by the Committee. Our decisions concerning these children are based predomiantly on two factors. These are: whether a child will be functionally capable of leading a productive life; and whether mutations, which will be inherited by subsequent offspring, are present."

Intellectually, Feldman could agree. Society...the race itself was struggling for survival. Dead weight: the deformed despite their intelligence levels, the blind genetic alleys created by ionizing radiation and biologic warfare could only impede it. Mass production of bodies, quantity alone wasn't the way to solve underpopulation if incapables outnumbered those who could support them. Strange to think that the opposite had been true, before the war. A world teeming with people, a time when physicians healed...

He stared at the baby in front of him. A boy, wriggling stumps that should have been arms and legs. The infant fought the nurse's hold, and his forehead puckered around the red mark as he began to cry.

102-93. Obviously a defective. As with all precertification children, hospital records shielded his parents' names from the staff. If Feldman hadn't rifled the files after receiving Laura's letter, would he have looked beyond the stumps to see Laura's gray eyes and the shape of his own face?

He snarled, "Keep the child still!" He was shivering, wracked by self-loathing. But he couldn't let a stranger do it — and he couldn't think any further, or he'd leave and never come back.

He narrowed the focus of his mind to the jugular vein standing out bluely against the white throat. Taking a syringe of euthanasia solution, Feldman inserted the needle through his son's skin.

FREDERIK POHL and C. M. KORNBLUTH
will be in F&SF's 25th Anniversary Issue
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A PARTICULAR MATTER

My beautiful, blonde-haired, blue-eyed daughter, who has been figuring in the various articles I write since she was a pre-schooler is now (as I write this) a new freshman in college. (Oddly enough, I myself haven't aged a day.)

It seems that she had not been at college for long when word reached her that a young man on another floor in the dormitory was dying to meet her, presumably, she was given to understand by an excited informant, to feast his eyes on her beauty. After some lady-like show of reluctance, Robyn agreed to allow the meeting.

In came the young man, eyes wide. "Tell me," he said, choking a bit, "are you *really* the daughter of Isaac Asimov?"

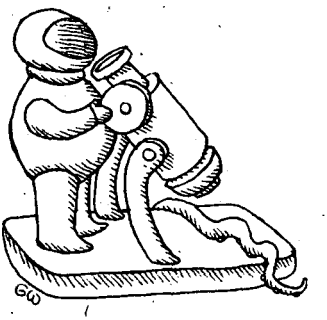
My daughter called me afterward, of course, and said to me, severely, "The worst of it was that he seemed to know everything about our private lives because he's memorized everything you've written."

Well, touché. I *do* have a personal writing style and I *do* suffer from a lack of reticence, and sometimes I feel defensive about it.

Yet ask yourself, if I had started this article with: "The two chief methods by which a radioactive nucleus can break down involve:

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science



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one, the emission of an alpha particle, and, two, the emission of a beta particle," would you have plunged in quite as readily as you would with a beginning like: "My beautiful, blonde-haired, blue-eyed daughter, who has been figuring in the various articles I write since she was a pre-schooler —"

So I hope Robyn will understand that the sacrifice of a little bit of her private life may be essential to the important function of paying those college bills plus ancillary expenses. (It's those ancillaries that get you every time.)

And now that that's taken care of —

The two chief methods by which a radioactive nucleus can break down involve: one, the emission of an alpha particle, and, two, the emission of a beta particle.

Of the twenty-one long-lived radioactive nuclides I listed in last month's article ("The Uneternal Atoms'), eight break down by means of beta-particle emission. Let's see what this means.

A beta particle is a speeding electron, and an electron carries a negative electric charge. It is produced when, inside the nucleus, a neutron (uncharged) is converted into a proton (positive) and an electron (negative). The proton remains in the nucleus; and the electron goes flying out of it at great speeds.

The mass of the nucleus (its "mass number") is taken as equal to the total number of protons and neutrons within the nucleus. Since this remains unchanged by any conversion of neutrons to protons, or vice versa, the mass number remains unchanged when a beta particle is emitted.

The total number of protons is, however, increased by one when a neutron turns into a proton. This means that the atomic number, which is equal to the number of protons, is increased by one. Since a change in atomic number means a change in the nature of the element, a nuclide that emits a beta particle becomes a nuclide of another element, the one a single unit higher up in the atomic number scale.

Let's take an example. Indium has an atomic number of 49. That means that every indium atom has 49 protons in its nucleus. Indium-115 has a mass number of 115 (the number attached to a nuclide is always its mass number), so that it possesses a total of 115 protons and neutrons. If 49 of this total are protons, then 66 are neutrons.

When indium-115 emits a beta-particle, one neutron turns to a

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proton and the total present becomes 50 protons and 65 neutrons. The element with an atomic number of 50 is tin, so by emitting a beta particle, indium-115 becomes the stable nuclide tin-115.

It is possible, of course, for a nuclide to break down by way of beta particle emission to a nuclide that is also unstable and breaks down further. For instance, calcium-48 (20 protons + 28 neutrons) emits a beta particle and becomes scandium-48 (21 protons + 27 neutrons). Scandium-48 is unstable and very short-lived and quickly emits a beta particle of its own to become the stable nuclide titanium-48 (22 protons + 26 neutrons.)

It is also possible for the reverse action to take place within a nucleus, for a proton to become a neutron. This can happen when a proton absorbs one of the electrons that is circling the nucleus and thus becomes a neutron.

In the case of such electron capture, the mass number of the nucleus remains unchanged, but the atomic number goes *down* by one. Thus vanadium-50 (23 protons + 27 neutrons) may capture an electron to become titanium-50 (22 protons + 28 neutrons).

None of the long-lived nuclides breaks down by electron capture only. Those that do (three, all-told) also break down by beta particle emission. Five break down by beta particle emission only. The details are presented in Table 1, where each nuclide has its proton (p) and neutron (n) content included.

Table 1 - The Beta-Producing Nuclides

parent nuclide	*nature of breakdown*	*daughter nuclide*
Potassium-40 (19p+21n)	beta particle electron capture	Calcium-40 (20p+20n) Argon-40 (18p+22n)
Calcium-48 (20p+28n)	two beta particles	Titanium-48 (22p+26n)
Vanadium-50 (23p+27n)	beta particle electron capture	Chromium-50 (24p+26n) Titanium-50 (22p+28n)
Rubidium-87 (37p+50n)	beta particle	Strontium-87 (38p+49n)
Indium-115 (49p+66n)	beta particle	Tin-115 (50p+65n)
Lanthanum-138 (57p+81n)	beta particle electron capture	Cerium-138 (58p+80n) Barium-138 (56p+82n)
Lutetium-176 (71p+105n)	beta particle	Hafnium-176 (72p+104n)
Rhenium-187 (75p+112n)	beta particle	Osmium-187 (76p+111n)

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The next question is this: How many beta particles are emitted by each of these eight nuclides?

If you compare equal numbers of atoms of different nuclides, you would find that the number of beta particles emitted per second is inversely proportional to the half-life. Thus, the half-life of indium-115 is 600,000 eons (where an "eon," as I explained last month, is equal to one billion years), while that of lutetium-176 is only 21 eons. This means that lutetium-176 must be breaking down some thirty thousand times faster than indium-115. Therefore, for every beta particle emitted by a particular large number of indium-115 nuclides, thirty thousand beta particles are being emitted by the same large number of lutetium-176 nuclides.

But equal numbers of the two do not exist in the Earth's crust. The weight of lutetium in Earth's crust is roughly eight times that of indium. Lutetium-176, however, makes up only about 2.6 percent of all the lutetium there is, while indium-115 makes up about 95.8 percent of all the indium. Therefore indium-115 is about five times as common in the crust as lutetium-176 is; at least, in terms of weight.

The total number of nuclides in a given weight is, however, inversely proportional to the atomic weight. In one gramof indium-115, there are 176/115, or 153, as many nuclides as in one gram of lutetium-176. Taking all this into account, there are about seven times as many indium-115 nuclides as there are lutetium-176 nuclides.

Allowing for the difference in quantity of the two nuclides in the Earth's crust then, it turns out that for every beta particle emitted by indium-115, about four thousand are emitted by lutetium-176.

Two other points must be taken into account. In the conversion of calcium-48 to titanium-48, *two* betal particles are emitted per atom.

Then, too, in the case of three nuclides, potassium-40, vanadium-50, and lanthanum-138, some individual nuclides emit a beta particle and some capture an electron. In the latter case, no particle is emitted.

Potassium-40 is sufficiently radioactive to make it possible to determine the proportion of individual atoms taking either route. It turns out that 89 percent of them indulge in beta particle emission and 11 percent in electron capture. That can be allowed for. In the case of the other two nuclides, radioactivity is so weak that the fraction following either route has not been determined (at least as far as I know). In their cases, we will assume for simplicity's sake that it is all beta particle emission.

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Keeping all this in mind, we can calculate the relative production of beta particles within the Earth's crust by these eight radioactive nuclides. The results (which can only be considered approximate since neither the half-lives nor the relative contents of the Earth's crust are known with great accuracy) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - Beta Particle Production

Nuclide	*number of beta particles (indium-115 = 1)*
Indium-115	1
Vanadium-50	6
Rhenium-187	33
Calcium-48	96
Lanthanum-138	730
Lutetium-176	4,000
Rubidium-87	5,600,000
Potassium-40	36,000,000

As you see from that table, the six least active beta particle producers, taken together, account for only a little over 1/10,000th of the total. This is so small that it can safely be ignored, and we can say that of these nuclides, the only important sources of beta particles are potassium-40 and rubidium-87, with the former supplying about 7/8 of the total and the later the remaining 1/8.

But what about radioactive breakdown by the emission of alpha particles?

Alpha particles consist of a firm association of two protons and two neutrons. When a nuclide emits an alpha particle, it loses those two protons and two neutrons. Its mass number therefore goes down by four units, and its atomic number, dependent on protons only, goes down by two units.

Let's take an example. Lead has an atomic number of 82, so that all its atoms have 82 protons in their nuclei. The nuclide lead-204 has a total of 204 protons and neutrons present in the nucleus, and since 82 of them are protons, 122 of them must be neutrons.

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Lead-204 emits an alpha particle. Its atomic weight goes down to 200, and its atomic number goes down to 80. Its nucleus now contains 80 protons and 120 neutrons. Since the element with an atomic number of 80 is mercury, the nuclide resulting from the alpha-particle emission of lead-204 is the stable mercury-200.

Of the twenty-one long-lived radioactive nuclides in the Earth's crust, thirteen break down by way of alpha particle emission. Of these thirteen, three are thorium-232, uranium-238 and uranium-235. These three I will leave aside for the moment, and concentrate on the remaining ten, which are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 - The Alpha-Producing Nuclides

parent nuclide	*nature of breakdown*	*daughter nuclide*
Cerium-142 (58p+84n)	alpha particle	Barium-138 (56p+82n)
Neodymium-144 (60p+84n)	alpha particle	Cerium-140 (58p+82n)
Samarium-147 (62p+85n)	alpha particle	Neodymium-143 (60p+83n)
Samarium-148 (62p+86n)	alpha particle	Neodymium-144 (60p+84n)
Samarium-149 (62p+87n)	alpha particle	Neodymium-145 (60p+85n)
Gadolinium-152 (64p+88n)	alpha particle	Samarium-148 (62p+86n)*
Hafnium-174 (72p+102n)	alpha particle	Yterbium-170 (70p+100n)
Platinum-190 (78p+112n)	alpha particle	Osmium-186 (76p+110n)
Platinum-182 (78p+114n)	alpha particle	Osmium-188 (76p+112n)
Lead-204 (82p+122n)	alpha particle	Mercury-200 (80p+120n)

(Note that in two cases, that of gadolinium-152 and samarium-148, the daughter nuclide is itself one of the long-lived varieties contained in the table and is therefore marked with an asterisk. We can ignore that slight complication, however.)

We can next calculate the relative numbers of alpha particles produced in the Earth's crust by these nuclides. In order that these be compared directly with the beta particle figures given in Table 2, I have calculated the figures for alpha particle production to the same arbitrary base which sets indium-115 particle-production equal to 1. The results are given in Table 4.

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Table 4 - Alpha Particle Production

nuclide	*number of alpha particles (indium-115 = 1)*
Lead-204	0.00005
Platinum-192	0.00014
Platinum-190	0.0026
Hafnium-174	0.008
Gadolinium-152	0.5
Neodymium-144	5.1
Cerium-142	5.7
Samarium-149	11
Samarium-148	310
Samarium-147	46,500

As you can see, the alpha particle production by these ten nuclides taken together is rather insignificant compared to the beta particle production of potassium-40 and rubidium-87. Even samarium-147, which produces about 99.3 percent of all the alpha particles for which these ten nuclides are responsible, produces only about 1/120th as many particles as rubidium-87 does.

But now let's get on to the three alpha particle producers I have left out: thorium-232, uranium-235, and uranium-238.

When each of these produces an alpha particle, it breaks down to a nuclide that is *not* stable. This is also true, to be sure, of gadolinium-152, which breaks down to samarium-148, which in turn breaks down to neodymium-144, which in turn breaks down to the stable cerium-140. Each of these breaking-down nuclides, however, is long-lived, so they can be considered separately.

We also have the case of calcium-48, which produces a beta particle to become scandium-48, which in turn produces a beta particle to become the stable nuclide titanium-48. Here, where calcium-48 has a half-life of 20,000,000 eons, scandium-48 has a half-life of only 44 *hours*. The half-life for the production of the second beta particle is so much enormously shorter than for the first, that we are perfectly safe in

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supposing that calcium-48 gives up two beta particles and working out our calculations on that basis.

We must do the same for thorium-232, uranium-235, and uranium-238 but that is not as easy as is the case of calcium-48. In the latter case only one short lived nuclide is produced before stability is reached; in the case of the uranium and thorium nuclides, about a dozen are. In the case of calcium-48 only beta particles are involved; in the case of the uranium and thorium nuclides, both alpha particles and beta particles are.

Thorium-232, for instance, gives off an alpha particle to become the short-lived radium-228, which gives off a beta particle to become the short-lived actinium-228, which gives off a beta particle to become the short-lived — and so on and so on.

The overall result is that we must consider the thorium and uranium nuclides as giving off a number of alpha particles and beta particles for each individual nuclide that breaks down before reaching stability (in each case) with one of the lead nuclides, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 - Thorium and Uranium

parent nuclide	*nature of breakdown*	*daughter nuclide*
Thorium-232 (90+142n)	6 alpha particles (12p+12n) 4 beta particles	Lead-208 (82p+126n)
Uranium-235 (92p+143n)	7 alpha particles (14p+14n) 4 beta particles	Lead-207 (82p+125n)
Uranium-238 (92p+146n)	8 alpha particles (16p+16n) 6 beta particles	Lead-206 (82p+124n)

Once we have the data given in Table 5, it is possible to calculate the number of alpha particles and beta particles produced by the thorium and uranium nuclides on the usual indium-115 = 1 standard. This is given in Table 6.

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Table 6 - Thorium and Uranium Particle Production

parent nuclide	*particle production (indium-115 = 1)*	
	alpha particles	*beta particles*
Uranium-235	410,000	240,000
Uranium-238	10,400,000	7,800,000
Thorium-232	12,600,000	8,400,000

From Tables 2, 4 and 6, we can choose those nuclides which produce more than a million particles by the indium-115 = 1 standard and prepare Table 7.

Table 7 - The Major Particle-Producers

nuclide	*particles produced (indium-115 = 1)*		
	alpha particles	*beta particles*	*total particles*
Rubidium-87	----	5,600,000	5,600,000
Uranium-238	10,400,000	7,800,000	18,200,000
Thorium-232	12,600,000	8,400,000	21,000,000
Potassium-40	----	36,000,000	36,000,000

Now I am ready to consider the question that I raised at the end of last month's article. I had shown that by far the large majority of the nuclide breakdowns taking place in the Earth's crust involved potassium-40 and rubidium-87. Why, then, was the radioactivity of uranium and thorium discovered ten years *before* the radioactivity of potassium and rubidium was?

Now, though, we have taken into account not only the breakdown of

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the nuclides, but also the number of particles that are produced as a result of the breakdown. Because the breakdown of uranium-238 and thorium-232 result in the production of about a dozen particles per nuclide breaking down, the disproportion between potassium and rubidium on the one hand, and uranium and thorium on the other, is reduced considerably.

If we consider the total number of particles produced by the natural radioactivity of the Earth's crust, rather than the total number of nuclide breakdowns (and it is, after all, the particles that we detect), it turns out that potassium-40 produces about 45 percent of them, thorium-232 about 26 percent, uranium-238 about 22 percent, and rubidium-87 about 7 percent. All other long-lived radioactive nuclides in the Earth's crust contribute less than 1 percent of the particles produced.

And yet even by counting the multiple-particle production of uranium and thorium, the division is still roughly fifty-fifty for uranium and thorium on the one hand, and potassium and rubidium on the other. The reason for the ten year lapse in the discovery of the radioactivity of the latter nuclides is still to be explained.

The answer lies in the fact that we must not consider *total* particles. Alpha particles and beta particles are not detected with equal ease. The ease of detection depends on the energy of the velocity. Alpha particles are some 7000 times as massive as beta particles, while beta particles speed along with some ten times the speed of the alpha particles. Combining the two, we see that the average alpha particle has some 70 times the energy of the average beta particle and is correspondingly easier to detect.

Well, then, uranium and thorium between them produce 23,000,000 of the comparatively easily-detected alpha particles while potassium and rubidium between them produce exactly none! *That* is the difference that accounts for the ten-year lapse before the discovery of the radioactivity of the latter.

Let's look at the matter from a different angle. There are six known nuclides with mass numbers of 87, but the actual mass of each is not *quite* 87 and is, in each case, different, as you can see in Table 8.

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Table 8 - Nuclides of Mass 87

nuclide	*mass*	*mass excess (millionths)*	*half-life*
Bromine-87 (35p+52n)	86.949	143	55.6 seconds
Krypton-87 (36p+51n)	86.9412	53	78 minutes
Rubidium-87 (37p+50n)	86.93687	3.3	46 eons
Strontium-87 (38p+49n)	86.93658	0.0	stable
Yttrium-87 (39p+48n)	86.9384	21	80 hours
Zirconium-87 (40p+47n)	86.9422	65	94 minutes

In that table, you can see that strontium-87 has the lowest mass in the series. It lies at the bottom of the mass-valley and is the one nuclide of that mass number that is stable. The other nuclides are all radioactive, and the larger their mass, the greater the push to undergo a radioactive change and the shorter the half-life of that change. (The mass excess is, to a large extent, liberated as energy.)

The mass excess is given in Table 8 for each nuclide in terms of millionths of the mass number, and as you can see the half-life is very sensitively dependent on that relative mass excess. Rubidium-87, which has a very small relative mass excess, has a half-life of 47 billion years, while yttrium-87 with a relative mass excess less than seven times as large as that of rubidium-87, has a half-life of only 80 hours.

We can do the same for the known nuclides of mass-number 40, and these are given in Table 9. Here you can see, there are two valleys.

Table 9 - Nuclides of Mass 40

nuclide	*mass*	*mass excess (millionths)*	*half-life*
Chlorine-40 (17p+23n)	c. 39.985	c. 200	1.4 minutes
Argon-40 (18p+22n)	39.97505	0.0	stable
Potassium-40 (19p+21n)	39.97665	40	1.3 eons
Calcium-40 (20p+20n)	39.97523	4.5	stable
Scandium-40 (21p+19n)	39.9902	380	0.22 seconds

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Argon-40 has a lesser mass than the nuclide before and after, and the same is true of calcium-40. Both these nuclides are therefore stable. As for potassium-40, that is only slightly higher in mass than the nuclide before and after, and so, although radioactive, it is long-lived.

Again, since the nuclide before potassium-40 and the one after are each lower in mass than potassium-40 is, potassium-40 can move in either direction. It can emit a beta particle and become calcium-40 or absorb an electron and become argon-40.

For reasons involving the proton-neutron arrangement within the nucleus, potassium-40 has a greater tendency to emit a beta particle and become calcium-40, although calcium-40 is slightly the more massive of the two stable nuclides of mass number 40. In that direction, the mass excess of potassium-40 is 36 and that is the number we should use.

To handle uranium-238 and thorium-232 requires an additional complication, for there we have to count in the mass of alpha particles, which, like the atomic nuclei generally, contain both protons and neutrons.

Thus uranium-238 gives off an alpha particle to become thorium-234. The mass of the uranium-238 nucleus is 238.12522, while the mass of the thorium-234 and the alpha particle taken together is 238.12065. The excess mass of the uranium-238 nuclide over its immediate product in millionths of the mass-number is 20. If we do the same for thorium-232, then the excess of that nuclide over its immediate product in millionths of the mass number is 19.

But we can't stop with the immediate product of uranium-238 and thorium-232, which are thorium-234 and radium-228 respectively. Each of these continues to break down, until lead-208 and lead-206, respectively, are produced. In the process, the breakdown of uranium-238 and its daughter-nuclides produces eight alpha particles altogether, while the breakdown of thorium-232 and its daughter-nuclides produces six alpha particles altogether.

The mass excess of uranium-238 over lead-206 and eight alpha particles, in millionths of the original mass number is 230; that of thorium-232 over lead-208 and six alpha particles, is 200.

We can summarize this in Table 10.

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Table 10 - Mass Excesses

nuclide	*mass excess (millionths)*	*half-life*
Rubidium-87 (no alphas)	3.3	46 eons
Thorium-232 (1 alpha)	19	14 eons
Uranium-238 (1 alpha)	20	4.5 eons
Potassium-40 (no alphas)	36	1.3 eons
Thorium-232+daughter nuclides (6 alphas)	200	down to fractions of a second
Uranium-238+daughter nuclides (8 alphas)	230	down to fractions of a second

Remember that the mass excess controls, to a large extent, the energy of the breakdown, that the energy of the breakdown controls, to a large extent, the energy of the particles produced, that the energy of the particles produced controls to a large extent, the ease with which they are detected.

In that case, if uranium-238 and thorium-232 broke down as they did but produced a stable product after the loss of a single alpha particle, their breakdowns would, on the whole, be less energetic than potassium-40 and more energetic than rubidium-87. To be sure, uranium-238 and thorium-232 would still have the advantage of shooting off an alpha particle in comparison to the potassium-40's less easily detected beta particle. That, however, might not be enough to guarantee primacy of discovery to uranium and thorium. It might well have been, in that case, that potassium would have been the element whose radioactivity was first to be detected.

However, the daughter nuclides of uranium-238 and thorium-232 slide down the radioactive hill pushed by much larger mass excesses than those involving the parent nuclide. The daughter nuclides have much shorter half-lifes, therefore, down to fractions of a second in some cases, and produce particles of much greater energies.

These daughter nuclides are invariably associated with uranium and thorium as found in nature, and it was their energetic particles, *theirs*, that were first detected and (naturally) attributed to the uranium and thorium that contained them.

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From Table 10, we see that the relative mass excess is 230 for uranium-238 *plus its daughter-nuclides*, 200 for thorium-232 *plus its daughter-nuclides*, 36 for potassium-40, and 3.3 for rubidium-37. And that order, uranium, thorium, potassium, and rubidium is exactly the order of the first four elements in which radioactivity was discovered.

No mystery at all.

What's more, you can also see why it is that when geologists talk about the warming of the Earth through radioactive breakdown in the crust, they are concerned almost entirely with uranium-238 and thorium-232 and scarcely at all with any other nuclide. What does the warming are those daughter-nuclides — those beautiful, blonde-haired, bl—

No, that's a different daughter.

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F. M. Busby ("Cage A Man," September 1973) returns with another good, strong story: this time about Art Forrest, whose mind was on a baffling and seemingly endless trip through other persons' bodies...

Getting Home

by F. M. BUSBY

When he woke and saw the bunny-rabbit wallpaper, he knew it had gone wrong. He'd forgotten the kid. But the man Charlie had been closer — what had happened? He'd thought Charlie was asleep before he let Gilda doze off, but maybe not. Or maybe the man woke up and left before the change could happen. Yes, that was probably it — the slob had taken off early, back to Seattle all by himself. Damn!

He'd gone to a lot of trouble to set Charlie up. As soon as Gilda's sister had gone home, leaving him alone, he'd given Gilda a bath and brushed her hair. He couldn't manage the intricate upsweep she'd worn the day before when he arrived with the mousy sister, and so he settled for letting the blonde waves fall loosely past her shoulders. The ends were slightly ragged — she must not wear her hair down much, he thought — but he didn't tamper with them. He knew very little about make-up, but could see by the mirror that Gilda's clear skin hardly needed it. He experimented with a pale lipstick; after several tries he decided it would do. Gilda's own habit patterns helped some, but not enough.

He could have managed the girdle by now — he'd had some practice — but he felt she looked better without it and ignored the mild protest he sensed. No, keep it simple. Bra and panties, sweater and slacks, sandals — that was enough. A last check on the hair, and he was ready to go.

He thought of using her car, but

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if things worked out right, it would be superfluous. He rode the bus downtown. Before leaving, though, he memorized the address; it would look funny if someone wanted to bring him home and he had to look it up.

In the first bar he had no luck, and so he went to another. It wasn't that no one wanted to pick Gilda up, but that none of the men were any use to him. In the second bar he talked with several before he found Charlie, who was going to Seattle the next day. It had to be the next day, of course. Charlie was no great prize, but at least he was pointed in the right direction.

Gilda's stomach, he found, didn't take well to alcohol, and God only knew what he was doing to her reputation in her own home town. But grimly he nursed his beer until it was warm and flat, talking to one and another and then all to Charlie.

Aside from an overweight problem, the man was presentable enough; Gilda's interest was only mild, but she was not actively repelled. Later, though, was like being bedded by a cross between a bull and a jack rabbit; her disappointment was evident. Too bad she'd had to be subjected to that, but how else to keep Charlie overnight? He'd tried to get him drunk, but the man had the capacity of a tank truck. So, no choice....

And all for nothing — the bum had copped out, leaving him with the kid. Barney, his name was. How old? Four, he thought — not old enough to cross the street by himself, let alone get to Seattle and find a chance to become Art Forrest again.

How long had it been now? Three weeks? It seemed like forever, one day at a time.

It began with the drug. "It's a new thing," said Eddie Finch. "Like acid, only better. You keep saying you want to trip — okay, here's your chance. Two bucks and the hit's yours."

"Gee, I don't know," Art said. "Are you sure it's good stuff?"

"Got it from the 'factory representative,' Roger himself. One for you and one for me." Eddie's grin showed prominent teeth. "Come on, man — finals are over. Before we start the summer quarter, let's have ourselves a time."

Art looked around his small apartment, at the books and clothes spread carelessly over the cheap furniture, and thought about it. All through his Army hitch and now his belated freshman year at the U, he'd heard the psychedelic mystique, but somehow there had always been a reason to postpone trying any of the stuff, And now? Well, why not? He had nothing

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better to do. Eileen was out of town for the weekend, and while they were halfway on the outs, he didn't feel like dating anyone else just yet....

"Okay, Eddie. Here's your two bucks. Now, so I don't forget."

Pocketing the money, Eddie grinned. "Don't worry, Art. Zonked or not, *I* wouldn't forget."

The pills were dark blue — shiny, irregular little spheres. Eddie filled two water glasses with Burgundy from a half-empty gallon jug and made a small ritual of swallowing the pellets with sips of the harsh wine. "Well, here we go, Art. After a while, that is. While we wait, let's clear the place a little and put on some music."

Art collected books into a stack on his desk and hung up most of the scattered clothing. Eddie sorted records and piled them onto the turntable. Turning the stereo on, he left the volume low. Then they waited, talking quietly and sipping wine.

Nearly an hour later Art had decided the pills were fakes. Then the rush hit him — *impact!* The overload that battered his senses was beyond anything he could have imagined. With effort he raised his head to look at the blur that a moment before had been Eddie and tried to speak.

"Heavy," he managed to say. "Too *heavy*, man."

When Eddie spoke his face came into better focus, but it shimmered like mist. "Go with it, Art," he said, slowly. "Don't fight it; let it be. Look at things — see how pretty? You're having a good time, Art. A *good* time."

Then it was easier; he let himself drown in the flood of sensation and was not harmed. Familiar objects rioted in kaleidoscopic color, ever changing, but at the same time he knew what they were and how they really looked. He was no longer frightened; this was fun! He relaxed his guard completely and lost himself in the moment.

The place became another place and all places, the time another time or many. Where was he? He didn't know and he didn't care; he no longer had the ability to care and didn't miss it. The whole universe came into his mind, and he fell in love with it.

He played with it; it changed. He went far, far into its depths and kept going, seeing and feeilng wonders everywhere.

An eternity later a voice spoke. "Hey, man. You lost?"

He had forgotten his starting point; he had forgotten there was a place to return to. Yes, he thought: reality. How do I get back to it?

It was easy. When he tried to open his eyes, he found they were already open; merely, he hadn't

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been looking out through them. He saw reality, shimmering only slightly now. But he wasn't a part of it. If anything, he and reality were on opposite teams. He laughed at the idea, and then he didn't.

"Help me," he said.

"Sure, what's the problem? You're all right." But the voice was wrong. He squinted to bring the face into focus, and for a moment he saw it clearly.

It wasn't Eddie's. It was his own.

"What's happened?" He shouted it. "Why are you *me?*"

"Calm down, Eddie," said the other. "You'll quit flashing in a minute."

"But I'm not Eddie; *you* are! I'm Art! Don't you notice anything wrong?"

"You're freaking a little, is all. Just take it easy, like you told *me.* Enjoy it, like you said. You'll be okay."

"Yeah." He inhaled deeply. "Yeah. It's just a 'visual.' It has to be."

"Sure," said his face to him, with his voice. Then the face yawned, and Art saw himself lie back in his chair and go to sleep...or pass out.

His vision was clearing; his muscles were real again. He stood shakily and walked over to look down at himself; the illusion persisted.

He shook his head and moved clumsily to the small bathroom. From the mirror above the washbasin Eddie's face looked out at him.

His orientation dropped away; for moments he was plunging through the universe again. Then he was back to face his panic in the familiar apartment.

He misdialed twice before he reached the Drug Crisis Clinic. A girl answered; after he hung up he couldn't remember two words of what he had told her.

Two men came to the apartment. They were quiet and gentle; soon he sat in the back of a panel truck, watching his own limp body sprawled on a stretcher, joggling slightly with the bumpy ride. He thought of what he must say at the clinic.

But as it happened, he said very little, for by the time they arrived it took him so long to form sentences that no one in that busy place was free to wait upon him and hear him. He felt himself being carried and laid onto a cot. His last thought was: I'll be all right when I wake up.

When he woke, he looked at the next cot and saw Eddie Finch. "Eddie! You all right?"

Eddie stared at him. "Sure. But who are you?"

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Then Art saw the hand he had reached out. It was a thin and wrinkled — an old man's hand, liver-spotted.

Before he had time to feel a reaction, Eddie turned away to look at someone sitting up in the cot beyond him. "Hi, Art," he said. "You okay now, too?" And again Art saw himself.

He fainted then, or something close to fainting. The next thing he saw was Art Forrest and Eddie Finch walking together, out of the room.

The old man's name was Einar Gundarrsen; he had a Social Security card and a long-expired driver's license. After a bad hour, during which Art came to realize that it didn't much *matter* whether he were insane, he braced himself to meet the situation on its own terms. There was no point in a 74-year-old cocaine freak claiming to be a 23-year-old college student; so he didn't. Instead he waited and listened, and learned. He learned about Einar Gundarrsen and thus about his own predicament.

Einar, the resident mind in the old body, was neither dead nor unconscious. He was receiving all sensory data and responding to it with thought. Art sensed the thoughts as they appeared, but he could not influence them — nor experience any memories that did not arise spontaneously. He was in full control of Einar's body, though, when he wished to be, and Einar didn't seem to notice any discrepancy. Einar, in fact, was not aware of Art's existence. Silently, with his mind, Art tried to "speak" to the old man, but there was no response. So again he waited.

The doctor, a little later, was cheerfully resigned to people like Einar. "You had us worried, old-timer. But you'll be all right, this time. Any chance of your kicking the nose-candy before it gets you?"

Riding Einar's thoughts, Art answered. "Ay don't use it very often, sir. Yust sometimes, when all things are...too much for me." The wife dead slowly and painfully, the fishing boat sold to pay medical expenses, the son dead in the war, the strumpet daughter a suicide. Nothing left, except Social Security checks and a room in a cheap flophouse. And nose-candy, sometimes. No wonder he sometimes took too much....

The doctor's gaze dropped, then rose again. He put a hand on Einar's shoulder. "Take it easy, then. And try to find yourself something to do. Something else...."

Einar wanted to apologize, but Art said only, "Thank you, sir," and Einar did not protest. Turning away, he left the clinic. Outside, he

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waited for a downtown bus; it came soon.

He spent the afternoon on the waterfront, watching boats and gulls, workers and tourists. He ate fish and chips and later discovered, with guilt to match his discomfort, that Einar's digestion was not equipped to handle his choice of victuals. As dark approached he felt the old man's urge to retreat to his own den — but Art was beginning to get an idea of what had happened to him, and if he were right, the last place in the world for him to sleep was a flophouse for derelicts. He caught a bus not to Einar's part of town, but to his own.

It was a dirty trick, he thought, to use the old man's money — but if he ever got back to himself, he could repay it. Apartment 310, next to Art's own 308, was vacant. Mrs. Swenson, the manager, agreed to rent it to Einar for a week, on "tryout."

He went to bed early, hoping for the best. But he woke up in bed with John Ferguson, in 312.

He was Sylvia Ferguson, of course. And the hell of it was that Art didn't even *like* Sylvia Ferguson, that fat blonde dummy!

Moving cautiously, to avoid waking Ferguson, he got out of bed. My *God*, he thought: without her girdle the woman's absolutely monstrous! So much for any fleeting idea of promoting a quick liaison with Art Forrest — to be followed, with luck, by a brief nap together. For that, he figured, was how it worked — when he slept, he shifted to whoever was closest to him.

And maybe if he once got home to himself, he could stay put. *But I sure can't get there from here!*

One thing he could do. First he found a robe to wear — it was bright pink, but if Sylvia wanted to look like a frankfurter, that was her business. He put money from her purse into an envelope; on the outside he wrote "Einar Gundarrsen." Then he went out and down the hall and pushed the envelope under the door of 310. If he had to owe money, he'd rather owe the Fergusons; they could afford it.

Belatedly, after shuffling ponderously back into 312, he wondered why Sylvia's thoughts showed no response to his action. Her mind was entirely concerned with making breakfast for John. He went along with her inclinations. A poor cook himself, he found that by letting Sylvia have the reins he could produce a pretty good meal. When she was ready, he called John Ferguson to come and get it.

So far so good, except that his feet hurt. Forty or fifty extra pounds, he thought, and usually

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teetering on spike heels, were cruel and unusual punishment.

While he didn't like being so fat, he was surprised to find that he could detect no emotional reaction to being in a female body. So far as he could tell, Sylvia's glands did not affect the essential male image of Art Forrest; he was who he was.

John Ferguson, blue-chinned and swarthy, stocky but not stout in his pajama bottoms, came silently to breakfast, barefoot on the chilly linoleum. Watching the man's slow, relentless eating, Art failed to notice how much and how fast Sylvia was putting it away on her own account — until she got up for seconds. He sat her back down. There was one burst of protesting thought; then she congratulated her conscience for keeping her on her diet. She still didn't like it, though.

John rose and refilled their coffee cups. "We'd better get at it, Sylvia, if we're going over to your mother's today." Her mother? In Spokane, came her thought. But that was nearly three hundred miles to the east. He'd have to try to put a stopper on that trip. If he could....

"John, I don't think we'd better go, after all." He felt the rise of Sylvia's bovine puzzlement, and ignored it.

"Not *go?*" Ferguson slapped his hand down on the table, flat and loud. "Damn it all, Sylvia, I rearranged schedules at work, just so we could visit your mother on her birthday, and I had one hell of a time doing it. It wasn't *my* idea, remember — let me tell you, Spokane isn't exactly Fun City! But I did it; I put everybody out of joint to do it. So now we're *going.*"

Without Art's volition, Sylvia was up and moving; he decided he'd better go along with it and not make waves. An hour later, the Fergusons were on the road to Spokane.

Ferguson was a fast driver and a good one; the trip took less time than Art had expected. Then came a dull dinner and a long evening with Sylvia's mother, brother and sister-in-law. Sylvia had a taste for sweet wine; she crowded the port a lot, and neither John nor Art stopped her. Toward bedtime Art got nervous, but it seemed that John and Sylvia were not much given to marital romance.

He woke as John Ferguson. From his viewpoint it wasn't much of an improvement, for if anything, John's thoughts were duller than Sylvia's. Bored, Art waited for night and return to Sylvia's body. The Fergusons were going home the next day — until then, he could do nothing. He was glad when John went to bed early.

But the next morning he was

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not Sylvia — he was Sylvia's mother. *What the hell?* Sylvia had been the nearest person, hadn't she? Maybe he couldn't repeat....

Well, the old lady would have to wangle an invitation to visit her daughter. She could sleep on the couch...sure, that couch was against the other side of Art's bedroom wall!

Then the woman's thoughts came clear to him, surprisingly sharp for the mother of anyone like Sylvia. She had to be in court the next day — something about a trust fund. *Damn all!*

The Fergusons left without him, then. In total funk, he let the resident mind make the proper good-bys. Then, against all her habits, he had a go at the port, himself.

And next he was Derek Ardwell, who rented the basement apartment, and then Derek's old Army buddy who stayed overnight because he'd had a fight with his wife. And then the buddy's wife, and then — the sequence, leading to no help for him, became hazy in his mind.

Two things stood out: first, he never repeated; and second, for good or ill he hadn't gotten laid once — until last night as Gilda, by Charlie the bull rabbit.

He didn't know whether to brag or complain.

And now he was four years old and named Barney, with a full bladder that spoke of urgency. He climbed over the sideboard of the small bed — large to him but small in the room — and fumbled loose the buttons of his warm fuzzy sleeper. Where, from here, was the bathroom? He'd been in this room only once, letting Gilda put the boy to bed by habit. Out in the hall there was more length to the right, and there — second door — was his goal.

The pressure relieved, he surveyed himself, both directly and in the full-length mirror behind the bathroom scales. Not a bad-looking little kid: blue eyes, square stubborn jaw, blocky build, blond hair that fell over his eyes too much. And he felt healthy: his senses were sharper than an adult's; it was almost like tripping. A person could do worse than be four years old, he thought. But of course it wouldn't last. Not for anyone — and for him, only a day. Besides, he might get tired of waiting for sex to come along. He looked at his potential for it and had to smile; the little clump looked so *innocent.* Well, it was....

"Barney!" It was Gilda; he hadn't heart her coming. "What are you doing, running around trying to catch a cold?"

What to say? Barney said it. "Nothing. I had to go pottie."

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Gilda laughed. "All right, that's good. Now let's get some clothes outside you and some breakfast inside. *Scoot!*" He scooted, and Gilda helped him dress. Just in time, he remembered not to try to tie his own shoes.

In the kitchen he sat on a cushion on an ordinary chair, too grown-up for a high chair. The soft-boiled egg tasted better than he expected; his youthful tongue knew flavors he had long forgotten. And his mind looked through Barney's four-year-old eyes to savor the charms of Gilda in her thin nightdress. Too bad, he thought, that I had to come visit her as her sister. And even more, he regretted inflicting Charlie on her; she hadn't deserved that.

But damn it, he was beginning to get desperate. Was there any end to this?

Gilda was in the bathtub. From the previous day he knew her penchant for steeping herself in warm suds; he had some time to think.

After his one manipulation of Einar Gundarrsen he had avoided, as much as possible, interfering with the normal behavior of the persons he became. The previous night, with Charlie, was an exception he regretted. But he had followed Gilda's thoughts and found casual desire mixed with only slight distaste, and so he had followed through with his fruitless plan.

If he were ever to get back to himself, he realized, he'd have to take actions that his "hosts" would have no reason to take. But he shrank from that necessity. Why? He wasn't sure. For one thing, he didn't want to get any innocent person into trouble or a really embarrassing predicament. Not that such events could be traced to him, but still....And that was the other part of it.

He had seen Art Forrest walk out of the Crisis Clinic with Eddie Finch. But who was it he saw? He had to know, and he had no good way to find out. Oh, there was a way — he could simply force one of his new selves to go to Seattle and confront himself, or to make contact by phone. But such an action would be *remembered* — and against the time he might become himself again, he wanted no clues pointing to Art Forrest as anything out of the ordinary. Why? Well, just because!

Wait a minute, though. Barney, the kid...four years old. What if *he* made a phone call? The content wouldn't mean anything to the boy; he'd probably forget it entirely by the next day. At least he wouldn't be able to keep it straight, and if Art watched his words — no problem. The phone bill? A dollar

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or so, marked only "Seattle." A little kid playing with the telephone; it happened all the time. Barney probably wouldn't even get spanked for it it; Gilda was an indulgent mother. Maybe Charlie had been an unnecessary mistake.

Four-year-old fingers found it hard to dial accurately; twice he miscued and hung up to start again. Third time was the charm; he got it right, all eleven digits, and listened to the ringing. Where the hell *was* he, the one at the other end?

He heard the bathroom door open; Gilda said, "Barney? Time to get ready, dear." *Damn!* He hung up fast and moved away from the phone before she could see him.

"Time for nursery school, Barney. Let's wear your blue jacket, shall we? It's a little nippy out this morning."

He'd been talking as little as possible, smiling a lot, remembering the kid from yesterday as cheerful enough but not much for chatter. When he did speak, he kept it simple, and Gilda didn't appear to notice anything different about him. But nursery school? He could fool an adult, maybe, because he knew how adults saw children. But how did children see other children? He'd forgotten. Hell, he'd never make it!

"I don't feel so good, Mommie."

"Don't feel good? Oh, sure you do. You ate like a horse, and your BM was just fine. Don't try to kid your ol' mommie, young horse." Expertly she stuffed him into the jacket. "Anyway, Miss Preston *isn't* mad at you for breaking the crayons yesterday."

"She isn't?"

"No, she isn't. She told me so. Cross my heart and hope to catch a mackerel."

He laughed, and the reaction was as much his as Barney's. Okay, what the hell — might as well take the chance. If the other tots — *and* maybe Miss Preston — thought a four-year-old was a little freaky one day, it wouldn't blight the kid for life. But he'd try to watch it.

Gilda was a better mother than a driver. He'd noticed, while being her, that her habitual driving motions felt sloppy; he'd had to add effort at the wheel. Well, nobody's perfect; at least she wasn't reckless or aggressive. But he was more glad than not to arrive at the white wooden house where Miss Preston held sway.

Inside, he was nervous. Gilda handed him over quickly, kissing him good-by and telling him she'd pick him up right on time for a change. Barney's thought told him she always said that but never made it and that it was no big thing anyway. Then Gilda left, and he was on his own.

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Miss Preston was a small, slim woman in a grey blouse and slacks, with black hair growing out from a shag cut. She smiled and said, "Aren't you going to hang up your jacket, Barney?" He looked around, ignoring the dozen or so other children for the moment, and saw no place to hang the damned thing. Miss Preston pointed to a folding screen at the side of the room, painted with birds in Japanese style; belatedly, Barney's thought echoed her. He went to it, looked behind and found the coat rack. Great start...

He was relieved to see that the other children weren't paying much attention to him. A couple said "Hi," and he said "Hi" back. The activity seemed to be random and loosely directed; he took a picture book from a table and sat down to "read" it. His impulse was to take a corner seat where he could keep an eye on everyone, but from his recent course in psychology he knew that would draw attention, and so he found a seat neither central nor peripheral.

It was a long morning. He listened to the kids — listened *hard* — so that when anyone spoke to him he'd have the language right. He watched to see where they went when they left the room; it would look pretty funny if he didn't know where the bathroom was, and Barney wasn't thinking along those lines. When he colored a page of a coloring book, he was careful not to be too neat. He broke one crayon, just to keep his average up. And he watched a couple of other boys, out of the sides of his vision, to see what colors they preferred, and followed a composite of their choices in his own work.

Lunch, when it came, looked bland to him, but his young taste buds found it delicious. Then his young metabolism made him drowsy, and when Miss Preston said "Nap time," it sounded like a good idea. Then, curled up with a pillow and half dozing, he thought: *Oh, no!* But it was too late; his body put his consciousness to sleep. He couldn't do a thing about it.

He woke to find himself gently chewing a blonde braid. He looked and saw he was wearing a pink dress. He felt unmistakable signs that he wasn't properly housebroken. Which kid was he, and how old? He had no idea; he hadn't paid that much attention. He rose quietly and went to the bathroom where he toweled away the worst of it; the dress should dry soon, especially after he rubbed the wet spot between two towels. The panties would take longer. Why he should go to the trouble for a kid he didn't even know, he wasn't sure — but the little girl's thoughts were distressed at the accident. He

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stayed there until someone knocked on the door; then he went out to rejoin the group. The spot still showed, but not much; the panties felt clammy. He had no idea where this kid had been sitting, or which was her coloring book if she had one, and, dammit, she *wouldn't* think about it. So he sat down with two other girls who were playing with modeling clay, and he squished the stuff in his hands also, careful not to produce any recognizable shapes.

One girl said to the other, "Sheila wets her pants." Then he was Sheila, and the mouthy brat had it in for him.

"So do you," he said without thinking and realized it had been Sheila's response.

"I do *not!* You'd better not say that." The other girl was larger; he could feel Sheila preparing to cry.

"I don't, either," he said. "It was my milk spilled."

"Sheila spills her milk," said the larger girl. Ah — Brenda was her name; thank you, Sheila baby. And a vengeful memory....

"Brenda steps on *dog* do! With both feet!" It was overkill. Brenda ran sobbing to Miss Preston, who was too busy solving another squabble to do more than cuddle and soothe the child. Wow, he thought, you're really a tiger on the nursery-school circuit.

With the pressure off, he had time to look around for Barney. The boy was playing a simple-minded card-matching game with three other kids. He showed no outward effects from his period of coexistence with Art Forrest.

Art found himself enjoying the clay game with the remaining girl, Melanie. It was a contest with no rules — just, "Okay, now look what *I* made," and nodding and laughing at the clay shapes. The laughing was the best part, and afternoon moved much better than morning had.

He was anxious at first, when the parents — mostly mothers, but there were two fathers — began to collect their offspring. He needn't have worried; Sheila was on the alert and recognized the woman. Nice-looking redhead, he thought — but on the whole he preferred Gilda. This one was thin, tense and preoccupied; she greeted Sheila absently, got her to the car with maximum efficiency and minimum talk, and drove home in single-minded concentration.

He asked only one question. "How old am I, Mommy?"

"Three, dummy. Can't you remember anything? And I'm not your mommy; I'm your stepmother. I've told you before; you call me Rhoda, understand? Or else I'll belt you."

"Yes, Rhoda." He felt Sheila's fear; the child was terrorized.

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Oh, brother! *This* kid had a hard row to hoe, for sure.

Sheila and her daddy and Rhoda lived in a fourth-floor apartment, but the man watching TV in the chartreuse living room wasn't daddy. "Say hello to your Uncle Frank, Sheila." He looked at the man — about thirty, slim, brown hair — reasonably good-looking, he supposed.

"Hello, Uncle Frank." Art suppressed her innocent remark that she bet she had more uncles than anyone in the world. He noted her thought that they never appeared when daddy was home.

"All right, come on." Impatiently, Rhoda took him to the bathroom. When he had paid his small tinkling tribute, she marched him brusquely to a bedroom. "Now you get your medicine, and I want you to lie down for a while." Medicine? He felt healthy enough. But Rhoda was removing the dress and then the panties; she paused and felt the cloth. Damn, part of it must be damp, still.

"You disgraced yourself again, didn't you?" Before he could stop her, Sheila nodded. *"I'll* teach you!" He was flipped face-down across Rhoda's knees and his bare bottom spanked, surprisingly hard. God Damn! That *hurt!* For an instant he was tempted to try Sheila's sharp little teeth on the exposed nylon-clad thigh, but thought better of it and merely allowed Sheila's startled wail to be heard. Why, the kid was in stark panic!

Then he was turned upright and set abruptly on the edge of the bed. "Now shut up and take your medicine." Rhoda picked up a bottle from the bedside stand.

Nembutal, for Christ's sake! Rhoda certainly didn't believe in taking any chances of being interrupted; what a bitch she was! And the stuff could be dangerous to such a small child. No point in trying to argue — he let the pill be put into his mouth but slipped it under his tongue while he swallowed water from the glass Rhoda held. "Now lie down," and Rhoda pulled up the covers.

As Rhoda closed the door behind her, he spat the capsule into his hand. He pulled a crumpled Kleenex from the bedside wastebasket and wrapped the wet thing in it, stuffing the wadded tissue well down among the debris.

He lay back and pretended sleep, while gradually Sheila calmed. Sure enough, about twenty minutes later Rhoda looked in, then closed the door. In the living room a record began playing; the volume was high. He guessed that Rhoda was a loud one in bed. He gave it a few minutes, then sat up and looked around.

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Jackpot! There was an extension telephone. He wondered why Rhoda had the kid in an adult's bedroom, but figured the bitch probably had her own reasons.

Barney's fingers had had trouble with the dial; Sheila's simply couldn't manage it. The stand had a drawer; he rummaged in it and found a felt-tip pen. Holding it in both small fists he dialed the area code and the number of his Seattle apartment. Then he picked up the handset again. His breathing was rapid and shallow.

"Hello?" The voice sounded like his own, but he couldn't be sure.

"Yes. Hello," he said. "Who is this?"

"Huh!" It was between a snort and a chuckle. "You're the one that called. Who's *this?*"

"I was calling Art Forrest."

"And you got him. Now who are *you?*"

"A — a friend. I mean, I need to talk to you. I mean, you *can't* be Art Forrest." Damn! He was getting rattled.

"The hell I can't." Definitely a chuckle this time; no doubt about it. "Look, what kind of game is this? And who *are* you?"

Who could it be? And how? "That doesn't matter. But this is important. Could you come to Spokane? Right away?"

"It has to be a gag. Who put you up to it? Eddie?"

"It's no gag. You *have* to come to Spokane."

"Sure. Naturally. Look, I'm busy. And I'm tired of listening to someone give an imitation of a five-year-old kid."

Three, he almost said, but caught himself in time. "I've got laryngitis, sort of, that's all. But listen, I've got to see you."

"Swell. You know where I live," and at the other end, the phone was hung up.

"*Shit!*" The word sounded strange in Sheila's piping little voice; he had to grin as he replaced the handset. But not for long — the man sounded like Art Forrest and talked like him, but he *couldn't* be. So — now what?

A further seach of the room produced little of interest and nothing of help. Then he heard footsteps and scuttled into bed to play possum as Rhoda looked in again. He was hungry, but on Rhoda's regime there was no chance of being fed; for several more hours he was supposed to be sedated. He needed to go to the bathroom again, but probably he couldn't get there and back without discovery. He was tempted to be imaginative and punitive with the contents of his bladder, but realized that Rhoda would take revenge on Sheila later. So he made

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do with the cluttered wastebasket, hoping the contents would dry by morning.

Then fatigue hit his small body, and like it or not, he fell asleep.

Snoring woke him to the half-light of false dawn. The room was unfamiliar, but the thought came that Frank *would* be a damn snorer, and he knew he was Rhoda. Then she thought she'd better put the brat on the john, if it weren't already too late.

He withheld control and let her go through the motions of getting up and going to Sheila, but with the child he enforced gentleness on the woman. Her reaction shocked him.

I'd like to drown her, right here in the toilet. And sometime I will — maybe next time! If Frank weren't here....

By God, she meant it! He gave thought to the quality of Rhoda's mercy. When Sheila was tucked back in, with more care than the little girl could have expected, he had made up his mind.

He took a few things, including the felt-tip pen, from the bedside stand. In the kitchen, under a stack of bills that told the name he needed to know, he found paper. Rhoda's habits controlled her penmanship, but he composed the text, taking clues from her thoughts as she saw the words appear one by one.

Ralph, I've been cheating on you every chance I get. And treating Sheila like dirt when you're out of town. She's too scared to tell you but sometimes I come close to killing her. I don't know why I do it. And I don't know why I can't stand it any more. But I can't.

—Rhoda

As he ran water into a glass and opened the Nembutal bottle, he could feel panic in her, but underneath it a resigned feeling of having been brought to justice. And no hint of realization that it wasn't her own doing.

For that matter, it didn't feel much like *his* doing — he'd never killed except in war, under hostile fire himself. But a puzzling feeling of compulsion drove him to get on with it. So he swallowed the pills, all of them, and went back to the guest bedroom. The snores had stopped.

It was a grim risk he took, for he couldn't know when the change would come. He might die with Rhoda — but somehow, for Sheila's sake, he couldn't let her live.

About midmorning, he woke as Frank.

It wasn't, he thought, going to be one of Frank's best days. The woman was dead, no doubt of it, and he could find no regret for her. But Frank was scared spitless, and there was no point in making things

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any tougher on him than they had to be. Or on Sheila. Or on Ralph, whoever he was when he was home.

Like any good detective-story fan, he found a towel and did his best to leave no Frank fingerprints in the apartment. The kitchen showed signs that Sheila had foraged there, but she was asleep when he looked in to check.

Before leaving he stood a moment — no, there was nothing more to do, here. Frank's thought told where his car was parked, and Frank couldn't get there soon enough. So it was time to go. Good-by, Sheila, you're a good kid. And good-by to you too, Rhoda.

But walking out, down the back stairs, he thought, *Did I play God here? And did I have the right?* Then he remembered Sheila's feelings, and Rhoda's, and said, *Hell, yes!*

Frank's car was on the nearest side street, a block back. It was a green four-speed Mustang, vinyl-topped; Frank liked it. Art had driven better cars, he thought, but had not owned any as new. He let Frank's reflexes show him the car's ways as he set out for the freeway, Interstate 90. It looked like a good day for a trip to Seattle.

He checked with Frank first, using an idea he'd developed while he was Sheila but had had no occasion to test. He said aloud, "Hey, why not drive over to Seattle today?" Frank's thought responded that he had the weekend off, so why the hell not? — and right now, he could use the distance! So it was agreed, but only Art knew of the agreement.

The Mustang was low on gas; he pulled into a station with a phone booth alongside. As the attendant filled the tank, he rehearsed what he must say. In the booth he dialed the police emergency number. "I want to report a dead woman," and he gave the address and apartment number.

"Yes, sir. Your name? And are you calling from that address?"

"No. I'm not in this. I just thought you should know about it and get there fast."

"Where are you calling from, sir?"

"It doesn't matter." But he wanted their help; he should tell them something. "The door was open, is all. I thought, maybe something's wrong, so I looked in. And she's dead. A bottle of pills; it's empty on the floor. And a note in the kitchen; it didn't make sense."

"You realize, sir, that you are criminally liable if —"

"The hell with that. There's a little girl — three, maybe four. Somebody get out there before the kid wakes up and finds her." He hung up and wiped his sweating

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palms on Frank's colorful mod-styled slacks.

Back in the car he let Frank's habits sign the credit card. He had a quick breakfast at a nearby cafe and drove onto Interstate 90. It was a good day for a drive at that.

Traffic wasn't bad; Art stayed in the fast lane and, without tailgating, went as fast as other people would let him. Usually, crossing the state, he enjoyed the scenery, but now he paid it little heed. He reached Seattle just as rush hour was beginning, driving off the freeway ahead of the main jam. And now, what to do next? There had to be a way to get next to whoever was calling himself Art Forrest. But not as a stranger....

All right, how about the neighborhood bar? He could use a drink; he'd driven nearly three hundred miles nonstop. Luckily Frank had a heavy-duty bladder.

He parked behind the Puzzle Tavern and entered by the back door. After repairing the damages of travel, he looked around the place. Not much of a crowd — who was there who might be of use? The outlook was poor but the hour was early. He sat at a back table, so that he could scan all who entered. He drank draft beer. The Puzzle didn't serve the best draft he'd ever tasted.

He knew the woman who came in alone; without thinking, he waved to her. She frowned, looking uncertain. Of course — she wouldn't know Frank from a can of mushrooms. But she got a beer at the bar and came over to join him.

"I don't *know* you, do I?"

"Sure you do — Frank Chapman. And you're Lydia Corgill, right?"

"Yes, but I don't remember *meeting* you."

"I remember you all right. At a party last winter, the last time I was in town. You wore a red dress." Hell, she practically always wore red to parties. But the detail set her off, talking. He'd forgotten that she talked so much in italics.

He could sense Frank's appreciation of the woman — young, slim, with her brown hair piled high — but he wished he'd chosen someone else. He really didn't like this one much, at close range, and earlier in the spring there had been a rumor about her venereal health. Eddie Finch hadn't caught anything, though, come to think of it. Anyway, she was a mixer; maybe she'd attract more people. And sure enough....

"Oh, there's *Cory. Cory!* Over *here!*" Waving her arm like a semaphore.

She wouldn't have luck, he thought, with Cory Purcell. Girls didn't interest big handsome Cory — men did, but he was too polite to be a problem to anyone. Not a bad

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guy, Art thought — if only you didn't have to be so careful of his feelings. Purcell came to the table; Lydia introduced them.

"Siddown, Cory," said Art. "Pull up a beer and sit a while."

Cory smiled, showing large white teeth. "Oh, good. I'll get a pitcher — a big one." He always overpaid his way, Art recalled.

Maybe Cory could be the answer. Twice when he'd had spats with his current friend, Art had let him crash overnight, with nothing asked nor offered but a place to sleep. Maybe it could happen again.

But first there was another problem. Frank was getting the message about Cory, and it made him uncomfortable, especially when Lydia and Cory began to flirt with him, mildly but in definite competition. Art was amused, but he could afford to consider only one factor: Which of them had the best chance of spending tomorrow night in Art Forrest's apartment?

"Where did you say you were staying, Frank?" Lydia's tone carried an unspoken invitation.

"No place, so far. I'm fresh off the freeway from Spokane."

"*Spokane?* My *sister* lives in Spokane. You *know* her, maybe? Harriet Collins, her name is now. They live up in Rockwood."

"No, I don't think so. I live out the other way."

"No place to stay?" said Cory. "Well, I have a spare bunk."

Now Frank was thoroughly alarmed. If this line were to be kept open, Art would have to reassure him, even at the risk of hurting Cory's feelings. "That's good of you," he said. Now what? As himself, he could have kidded Cory — but as a stranger? No.

"But look," he tried again. "No offense, but I kind of got the idea, uh — and you see, I don't..." Damn! He was *all* hung up.

Cory's smile stiffened, but he rallied. "I'm really that obvious? Sorry. But the offer's still good. A place to sleep, and that's all."

Now Lydia was getting a message of her own, it seemed — that whatever else, *she* was being cut out of the game. "Oh, let's don't talk about *sleep* yet. Why, the night's *young*."

"Hardly begun, in fact," said Art. "And we're low on beer. No, sit down, Purcell. My turn." He took the pitcher to the bar for a refill — it was faster than waiting for the bar girl, busily chatting at another table. He saw Lydia and Cory talking with apparent intensity and wished he could overhear. It had to be pretty choice stuff, from the looks of them.

The discussion had ended when he returned. He poured, all around. "Well, here's to us," he said, "whoever we are."

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"*That's* a funny thing to say, Frank. Isn't it, Cory? Really *funny.*"

"Very," said Purcell. He drained his glass and stood. "I just remembered, there's a movie I want to see." He reached into a pocket. "I won't be home until about twelve. If you get tired before then, Chapman, here's my spare key." He recited the address; Art repeated it.

"But look, Cory — you're giving me your key? A total stranger?"

"I trust people. I have to. Well, good night, for now." He left, walking fast.

Art looked at Lydia. "What the hell did you say to him?"

She looked away. "What makes you think I had anything to do with it?"

"Come off it, Lydia. What did you do to the guy while I was at the bar?"

"What do *you* care?" She made a pout. "Oh, all *right.* I just told him I'm *tired* of types like him trying to cut me out with fellas, and it was just plain *bitchy* of him to take you home when you don't even *want* him. And —" She stopped abruptly, eyes wide; obviously she'd said more than she'd intended.

He grinned at her and decided what the hell — he'd go along with Frank's inclinations. "I'm not sleepy at all," he said. "But the beer isn't too great here."

"Do you like bourbon?" she said, smiling. "I have a bottle."

"Sure. But let's grab something to eat first. It's a long time since breakfast."

Both times he took care not to lie afterward and chance dozing, though after the day's drive Frank's urge was to rest. The woman's personality, he thought, was not so abrasive in itself, but her voice needed a disconnect switch. No, he'd never get to Art Forrest in her guise — not locally, with the threat of longer term involvement. He drank sparingly, needing to keep his wits. Frank's capacity was greater than his own, but still, a little caution wouldn't hurt.

"How are you *feeling,* Frank honey?" They sat on the sofa, across from a silenced Western movie in glorious TV color.

"All right. Good, I mean. A little tired. How about you?"

"You know how *I* feel?" Her liquor was showing. "Like *more.*"

"All right. I'll pour you a little." He did.

"Not that. *You* know." Sure he knew, but it was late and he was tired.

"No way, I'm afraid. This man is wrung out like a dishrag."

Her pout slipped. "Well, let's go *sleepy*-bye for a while then. And maybe later I'll wake you *up.* You'll *like* that."

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"Well..." He pretended to consider, then to do a double take. "Oh hell, I forgot. Gotta take Cory's key back. And besides, I'm really pooped."

"I could put it in his *mailbox* tomorrow. Or *you* could. Huh?"

He shook his head; all else aside, he had to get away from this woman. Frank wanted to stay, but the hell with Frank; he'd had a good tour, hadn't he?

"No, I really have to go." He tipped her chin up and kissed her. "Don't be jealous, Lydia. You won the war, didn't you? And it's been good."

"*Call* me tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow night, from Spokane. I'm heading back in the morning. Gotta work, ya know?"

"All right. Good night, Frank. Like you say, it's been *good*."

Cory wasn't home yet. He hadn't been kidding; there were two beds. Art showered and drank a glass of Cory's orange juice. Then he put the key on the kitchen table, hung his clothes over a bedroom chair and went to bed. He guessed he had the right bunk; the other had the personal conveniences alongside.

He was tired but couldn't sleep — waiting for the other shoe to drop? When Cory came in, he was quiet, but Art heard him and then saw him in the dim light.

"Are you still awake, Frank?" the man said softly, and waited.

You should at least say good night to your host, Art thought. "Yes. The key's on the kitchen table. And thanks."

"Fine. I'll close up shop in a minute. And — don't worry. I—"

"I wasn't worrying. You're a good guy, Cory. Good night."

He heard water running, and the refrigerator door opened and closed. Then Cory came soundlessly into the room and turned out the night light. Art could hear him, moving in his bed and pulling the covers around; then it was quiet. But still Art wasn't sleepy; instead, he found he was excited.

Oh, no! he thought. The hots for Cory? It can't be. Then he realized it wasn't his excitement; it was Frank who was half attracted, half repelled. Well?

Careful, let's check this out. Burying his face in the pillow, he whispered, "So I play games with Cory. How do I feel tomorrow morning, having breakfast with him?" The answer was shockingly swift: Frank's premonition of guilt and shame, resentment at Cory's shared knowledge of his lapse — a vision of reasserting masculinity with both fists. Art shook his head.

"No," he whispered into the pillow. "Cory leaves me alone and I leave him alone. He trusted me with his key; I owe him that much. Time

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to go to sleep." It took some minutes longer, but finally Frank relaxed and let Art get some sleep.

Cory hadn't drunk much, Art realized, waking to see Frank in the other bed — not snoring this time but still asleep. Just as well; it wouldn't hurt to be up and dressed, fully in charge of the day, when Frank came to life.

Cory's thoughts revealed a great yen for his guest, but he was honor-bound to let his love go unrequited. Instead he performed morning routines and checked breakfast supplies before rousing the other man. Bacon and eggs seemed about right, Art thought, and Cory did not disagree.

Frank was a slow waker, a little groggy but apparently durable. He ate quickly, not saying much. His clothes, worn for at least the third day, were somewhat rumpled but still presentable. Obviously he had no wish to outstay his welcome; as soon as he finished breakfast, he vanished into the bathroom. Whenhe came out, he paused for a moment and then abruptly held out his hand. Cory took it.

"Want to thank you, Purcell," Frank said. "Nice of you to put me up for the night. Real good breakfast, too. And, uh — well, I guess I'd better be going. Gotta get on the road, you know. And thanks again." He didn't move, though.

"That's all right, Frank," Art said. "Anytime." He released his hand from the other's grip, and Frank went to the door.

"So long, then," he said, and left.

Well. Cory hoped he'd come back some day; Art didn't think the return engagement was a good idea. He spoke aloud, hoping Cory was paying attention to what he said with his mouth. "That one could turn out to be a very rough trade indeed." He wasn't sure that Cory was convinced.

Art knew that Cory, as chief dispatcher for a trucking firm, sometimes worked odd schedules. But apparently he wasn't working today; the man's thoughts showed no need or intent to leave the apartment. Cory began tidying the place, dusting knickknacks, but Art was soon bored; he put the rag away and got a beer from the refrigerator.

Cory, he found, didn't smoke. Daytime TV was more than Art could stomach. The only books in the place were of the same predictable kind. It looked to be a long day.

The door chime came as a welcome surprise to Art, but he was more surprised at the intensity of Cory's reaction; the man practically leaped to admit his caller. At the door and then entering was a tall,

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slim boy, about nineteen. Cory's recognition of his current friend and protege, Sid Langlie, was neon-lit to Art's perceptions. And as soon as the door was closed, the boy threw his arms around Cory and kissed him.

Jesus! *Now* what? Art disengaged from the kid, as gently as he could manage in a hurry.

"What's the matter, Cory? Are you mad at me or something?"

He shook his head. "No, of course not. I'm just...tired. Don't feel too good this morning." Cory searched himself for signs of bad feelings but found none. "I'm—I'm just not in the *mood*, Sidney, that's all." I'm *not?* thought Cory.

The boy was nettled. He pushed past and looked into the bedroom, then the kitchen. "You had somebody here last night, didn't you? Two breakfasts, I see, Cory. But why two beds?"

Think fast. "I had somebody here, yes. But not what you think. We sat up late and talked, is all. And I drank a little more than I should have." Cory knew better; he couldn't understand why he was saying these things. Cory was smarter than Frank; he noticed discrepancies. Watch it, dummy!

"Anyway, can't we just enjoy each other's company Sid?"

"That's not what you said yesterday. You're lying to me, Cory."

Before Art had a chance to think, Cory reacted. "Don't say that. Don't *ever* say that. I don't lie to people; I don't have to." But somehow, he *had* lied; Cory's thoughts were chaotic. He took a deep, ragged breath. Art saw what he was thinking and decided to give him his head. "And just for that, Sidney, you trundle your smart ass right out of here. Yes, *now*. And don't come back!" His voice was trembling. "Now for a *week!*"

The boy was backing away, looking puzzled. "Well, look, Cory. I didn't mean it; you know that. Can't I —?"

"Call me on Friday. If you want to." He took the boy by the arm and escorted him to and out the door. There were no good-bys.

And then Cory threw himself headlong onto the sofa and sobbed bitterly. For once Art found he had no control at all. Now what, he thought, *should* I have done?

He was using Cory deliberately, as he had used or tried to use all the people he had been since the whole thing began. Was he justified? Maybe. The sooner he got back to himself, the sooner he could stop running other people. Meanwhile, no matter how Cory felt about it, he hadn't *wanted* to experience intimacy with that scraggly kid. In atonement, when Cory stopped crying and got up, Art let him do something he himself found rather

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disgusting. Well, he'd wondered about that kind of thing, and now he knew.

He decided to wait until midevening to call his own apartment. He didn't feel like dinner, though Cory was building an appetite. Over and over, he rehearsed the coming call.

It didn't go as rehearsed.

"Hello? Art? Cory Purcell here."

"Hi, Cory. What's up, or shouldn't I ask?"

He laughed; it was a standard joke. "Well, Art, I'm having a little problem here, with my friend. Three's a crowd, and you've put me up before, and I wondered —" Cory was puzzled, but decided he was playing a joke on Art.

"Hey, sorry. Not tonight. I've got a chick coming over. Maybe you know her. Hell, sure you do!"

He could see it coming. "I do?"

"Lydia Corgill. She talks too much, but I was a little drunk when I made the date. Well, hey, sorry, like I said. If you still need a crash tomorrow, give me a holler. Gotta go now. Bye."

Hell and *damn!* If only he'd stayed with shrill italic-voiced Lydia. But he hadn't thought she had a chance of getting to Art Forrest, whoever he was now. Now he'd wasted the whole pitch, including Cory's big day.

Or had he? Could he pull the apartment-310 ploy again, making sure to move the bed closer to 308 than to 312? He'd have a 50-50 chance, and if he came up Lydia, he could just stick around for another snooze, with any luck at all.

It couldn't miss. Except that when he called Mrs. Swenson, he found that 310 was already rented...and so, long since, was 306.

Cory didn't often drink whiskey, and he stocked a poor brand, but bad whiskey was better than none. And the ice helped. Art thought....

All right, what if I don't *go* to sleep tonight? Maybe I can crash at my own place tomorrow. Cory caught a good night's sleep; he's in shape for it.

So he poured the rest of the glass down the sink. Can't afford to drink, today and tomorrow; it'll be hard enough to stay awake.

To stay awake, yes. He couldn't leave it to chance. He rummaged in Cory's medicine cabinet and found no signs of "uppers." Nothing of the sort in the bedroom, either. He asked out loud, "I wonder if there's anything around here to keep a guy awake if he wanted," and Cory's thought was negative.

Who did he know who was a pill freak? Eddie Finch, who else? He called.

"Eddie? Cory Purcell here."

"Sorry, - I'm taken." Eddie

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didn't like Cory and made no bones about it.

"No...I mean, could I get some uppers from you, please? I need to work all night, and I don't have anything here."

After a pause, Eddie said, "Yeah, I guess so. Sure. When you want 'em?"

"Uh, could I come over and get them now?"

"Why not? Bring money, keep Finchpad green."

"Yes, I will. And thanks."

Art hadn't noticed before, but from Cory's height Eddie Finch was a buck-toothed little shrimp and a rather obnoxious one. Most of the difference was probably Eddie's attitude toward Cory; he seemed to despise the man and fear him at the same time. "Yeh? You want some uppers, huh? How many you want?"

"I had a good sleep last night, got up about eight this morning, and need to keep going until tomorrow evening. How many would that be?"

Eddie nodded his head at an angle, thinking. "About ten bucks, my prices. And unless you want to be climbing the walls, don't take any one of them until you really need it. Okay?" He thumbed pills, poured from a small container, off his palm into a smaller one. "Ten bucks, right?"

They made the exchange. "Right. And thanks, Eddie."

"Anytime. But don't get sold on those. There's better stuff."

Better stuff...yes, but how could *Cory* ask what Art wanted to know? Well, have a try. "That stuff you and Art got last month must have been pretty wild."

"Oh, that." Eddie shrugged. "Well, it was new, and we got a little bit of an OD for a while." He looked plaintive or angry; Art couldn't be sure which. "So I freaked out for a couple minutes, was all. And part of my head hollered for help to the Crisis Clinic. Hell, inside I knew I was okay, but the twitchy side of my head dialed the phone. Didn't even feel like me doing it.

"But no problem. Art and me had a free ride and a free sleep, and that's all there was to it."

"Do you see Art very often, now?"

"Same as usual, not too often. Why?"

"Oh, I was wondering how he is these days."

"Got the hots, huh, Cory?" Was it Art or Cory who wanted to hit him, then?

"No." It was Cory who spoke. "I like Art and I respect his preferences. And he respects mine."

"Well, goodie for you. Have fun with the uppers."

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"Yes. Well, not fun, exactly. But I'm sure they'll help. Good night." Be damned if he'd thank the guy again!

One thing he could do, back at Cory's apartment, was eat. Cory liked to cook, and with nothing better to do, Art enjoyed riding along watching that skill. The preparation of dinner took nearly two hours; when it was on the table, Art ate slowly and ceremoniously, sipping wine and savoring each bite of food. Cory made a good grade of veal scaloppine, that was for sure! And while Art wasn't much of a wine freak, the Grenache rose set the meal off perfectly. It struck him that if he ever got back to himself he'd like to be on dining terms with Cory Purcell.

Dishwashing and other chores used up more of the evening. Then there was nothing but TV — he didn't want to go out, and he didn't want to stir Cory up by reading from the shelf of homo-porno. So he watched TV and sipped — not drank, but sipped — beer. And ate peanuts. Halfway through the late, late show he found himself interested in the plot of a commercial. It was time for his first upper.

It was a long night, a long morning and a long afternoon. The pills kept him on a thin nervous edge of alertness, but underneath he could feel the body's protests. Cory was bewildered; he couldn't understand why he wouldn't let himself go to bed. The jitters were getting bad, too; around the middle of the afternoon Art said the hell with it and took a chance on a belt of bad bourbon — or rather, "blended whiskey" — America's Favorite, it said on the label. So much for America's Taste, he thought, but sipped it down, anyway.

Dinner was chicken in a wine sauce; it was probably great — Cory seemed to enjoy it — but Art couldn't give it due attention, any more than he had to the cooking. As long as Cory didn't try to lie down, he let him have his way.

At eight o'clock he could wait no longer; he called Art Forrest's apartment and asked for sanctuary. He got it. "Thanks," he said. "I'll be right over."

The hell of it was that the Art Forrest who answered the door looked and sounded exactly like Art Forrest. "Hi, Cory. Come on in and rest it. Have anything?"

There was nothing he could do but play it straight. "Thanks. A beer, maybe?" He sat and watched himself go to the refrigerator.

"Sure thing. I'm stocked up."

Watching Art cross the room, he was surprised to find Cory really

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didn't have a yen for him, except in a reflexive sort of way. A memory flashed, of persistently repressing desire for the sake of friendship. Poor Cory! "Thanks, Art," he said.

"Any old time. Well — your friend still has a guest?"

"Uh, yes." This was bad; Cory was getting antsy again. Without moving his lips, Art subvocalized, "I'm just *kidding*. He'll get a big laugh out of it when I explain." Cory relaxed a little, but not entirely.

"Where'd you sleep last night?" said the other Art.

"On the couch. But it's too short — not like yours here."

Art laughed. "I know it's not really funny, Cory, but you must have looked like a pretzel."

"I guess so. Uh — were you going any place tonight?"

"Me? No, I'm pooped. That Lydia! Doesn't know there's a time to stop and a time to go." He lit a cigarette, and for the hundredth time Art wished that Cory were a smoker.

"I'll probably sack out early, Cory, but you can sit up and read if you like. Or watch TV, maybe — you always keep the sound low enough; it doesn't bother me."

"No, I'm tired, too. Didn't get much sleep last night."

"I can imagine. Another beer? I'm having one."

"Yes. Thanks, Art. Gee, I should have brought some, shouldn't I?"

"Forget it. Last time you gave me a bottle of booze; you're paid up for a month of Sundays." But inside, remembering how he had disliked America's Favorite, he cringed for Cory.

He was wasting time; maybe this Art could tell him something. "Say — Eddie was telling me a little about that trip you two had, the one where you went to the Clinic. What was it like for *you?*"

"Oh, wild! — my head was really spaced for a while. And then Eddie freaked some. But about that time I corked out cold and woke up next morning in the Clinic."

"That's all? Didn't you feel any different afterwards?"

"No, same as always — except a little high for a couple of days."

He couldn't believe it; it *had* to be a put-on. But the man across the room seemed utterly relaxed and natural. What could be running his head now, when *he* wasn't home?

"Well, it's good that you didn't have any permanent effects, Art."

"Yeah. But you know, I think that stuff's too powerful to mess around with. Next time I'll stick to plain old acid, or maybe even mesc, if I find any I can trust."

"Next time? You'll trip again, after that?"

"Not right away, Cory — not for a few months, anyway. But, you

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know? — once I got to where I could take it, having my head wide-open like that, it was — well, there's nothing like it. I think I need to do it another time or two."

We'll see about that, he thought, but said only, "Well, do your own thing, I guess."

"Right, Cory." The conversation slowed; his latest pill was wearing off, and the other seemed tired also.

He yawned. "Art, I think I've had it for tonight. Are the blankets still on the closet shelf?"

"Yes. Here, I'll help you." Between them, they spread the covers to relative smoothness. "There you are."

"Fine. Thanks." His beer was finished, and so he took first turn in the bathroom, then waited for Art to go before he undressed. He was under the covers when Art returned, facing away; Cory didn't want to see him nude — or perhaps, to be seen seeing.

The lights went out, and sleep came soon.

He half woke, began to drift back to dozing. Then it hit him — *this it it!* Eyes out of focus and staring, he came fully awake.

At last! He was in his own bed, and asleep on the couch was Cory Purcell. Now, by God, he'd find out what had been going on for the past three weeks — whether he'd been operating on "automatic pilot" or just what the hell *had* happened. But from that other track of himself, no thoughts came.

All right — sometimes memory could be fractious, elusive. But now, in his own body, he'd have direct access to it rather than the fragmented view of a rider on another consciousness. Let's see, he thought — what was I doing yesterday? Nothing happened; he remembered only the day spent as Cory.

What is this? By newly formed reflex he subvocalized his earlier question, and obediently the memory arose: After he'd got rid of Lydia, it had been a dull day, but that had been a welcome relief. He must have been really drunk to make a date with that one....

Then he realized — he *wasn't* in his body in the old way — he was still a rider! But then...who was the resident mind now?

"Who am I?" he asked. "What's my real name?"

An answer came, the only answer he could not accept: *Art Forrest.*

He tried to cling to logic: Were there two of him? Had the drug split him into two selves, one "at home" and the other hopping from body to body? Frantically he searched for fraud or flaw in the identity that answered him, but he could find none — the Art Forrest

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at home in his body was every bit as much Art Forrest as he was. He couldn't be — but he was. Only shock kept him from panic.

Now what? For starters, he interrogated the "inside man" and learned that in his absence things had gone along much as usual. Nothing of importance had happened; the resident mind thought upon its routine with relative contentment.

As: the summer quarter had begun, and he was enrolled in the courses he'd planned to take. He and Eileen had finally split up, amicably enough; he was hoping soon to consummate a new romance. The girl was blonde, named Cynthia; Art had met her a few times. As usual, money was scarce but he wasn't quite broke. Nothing was new, to speak of....

He was stymied — in his body but not *of* it. When Cory woke, Art made conversation with half his mind, letting the inner Art do most of it. Cory wanted to make breakfast; Art let him, as he obviously enjoyed the chance to show his expertise and do service for his lodging. He also washed the dishes, including yesterday's pile. Then he began to fold the blankets.

"Never mind," Art said. "I'll do it later."

"Well..." Cory paused, fidgeting. "Art, I have to tell you something."

"Oh?" He had a premonition.

"Art, I lied to you. I don't know why I did it; I *never* lie; you know that."

"That's right, Cory. You're the most truthful guy I know."

"But for some reason I *had* to come over and stay here last night. So I said my friend had someone at my place, and he didn't. He wasn't even there himself."

"Oh?" Don't say anything more; let *him* tell it....

"I don't know what got into me, Art. I seemed so *important* to stay here. And I don't know *why*." He looked even more embarrassed. "I mean, we're friends, of course; I always like to see you. But... anyway, it wasn't that I was *after* you or anything like that."

"I know, Cory." Now, what to say? "Look — don't worry about it. You'll be okay; everybody's head does funny things sometimes. And I was glad to have you here." *That* was true, at any rate, even though this situation was as confused as before, or worse.

"All right, Art. I just had to tell you, was all. And thanks."

"Anytime. Well, *almost* anytime." They grinned, and Cory left.

No matter how he wrestled with it, the problem wouldn't solve. He was in his head not once but twice, and the *he* of him was the outsider. He sat in the apartment, occasion-

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ally sipping a beer or munching a snack. No answers. And what would happen when next he slept?

The question frightened him. Would it be all for nothing? Would he be displaced and again go body-hopping, doomed for all his life to having one identity after another and never his own? And existing in that fashion, how long might he live? Would he somehow die with the Art Forrest body, or only when he found himself a rider with someone who met death waking?

Or would he go stark, raving nuts first? Such as maybe this very afternoon....

The hardest thing to take was the waiting, and the longer it lasted, the worse it got. If he could stay awake forever — but, of course, he couldn't.

So why not get the suspense over and done with? He took two sleeping pills and went to bed.

"I find you at last. Where have you taken yourself for so long?" The words weren't English, but he understood. Who spoke? He saw no one in this dim luminous place his apartment had become. Was he tripping again — a "flashback"? He couldn't feel his own body, or see it. He saw without eyes, heard without ears.

Then he did see his body — lying on the bed, in front of him. In front? Or was it to one side? Directions were confused; there *was* no front or back to his view.

"Who's that?" With no voice he said it. "Where are you? What's happening?" Then, relieved, he laughed. "Oh, hell — I'm dreaming, that's all."

"You do not see me? I will shift frequency a few increments." A brighter patch of light appeared and seemed to thicken before him. "But who would you expect, here? There are only two of us. And where is it that you have been?"

He tried to shake his missing head. "I think I get it — you must be the other Art Forrest, the one that stayed put. Is this some kind of symbolic hallucination, some way we can put ourselves back together again? My God, I'm so tired of bouncing from body to body — I just want to be *me* again!"

"You? But without doubt you are you. Have you a wrongness? Allow me to read you."

The bright patch approached and touched him. He felt warmth; it vibrated at first, then pulsed smoothly.

"There *is* a wrongness," the other said. "And so strange — you have come to believe that you *are* the human."

"I know who I am; I just have to get back, is all." This halucination, he thought, was getting too big for its breeches.

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"I am reading to learn the cuase of it," said the voice. "Ah, I find it; it is here. The human had ingested a drug. As you scanned him in the usual mode, it took affect. And — *most* strange — on you, as well."

"It was Eddie's pill, all right; I guessed that much. Flipped me out — I mean, *really* out. But how —?"

"Tied to the human by the scanning mode, you disoriented as he did. The feedback imprinted his entire memory and personality over your own, which seems to be in stasis. And when the scan ended and you transferred, automatically, to the next subject, you still retained the human pattern." The voice chuckled. "How totally confusing, for you!"

You don't know the half of it, buster. "You're not helping much." He had to get this — whatever it was — back on track, fast. "Look: I'm Art Forrest, nobody else. Just put me back together, is all. If you can...if you're real...if I'm not dreaming you..."

"Dreaming? Yes. obviously — your consciousness has followed the human wake-sleep pattern. And only in the sleep phase could your own abilities operate, instinctively. Then, each time, you transferred to scan another human as our mission requires."

"Mission?" *This guy is even confusing my confusion!* "Look, fella — I'm *out* of the army now."

"You will remember soon. Ah! I note that your own feelings did become operative at one juncture."

"My own feelings?"

"You destroyed the woman who outraged our instinct for the welfare of the young. In all other cases you were governed by the human imprint.

"Even under such handicaps you have absorbed much valuable data, as have I. The task of correlation, awaiting us on the ship, will be massive."

"Ship?" *Now, hold it!* "You're trying to tell me I'm not Art Forrest? I guess *I* know who I am!"

"For the best, we should return immediately. In this mode I cannot transpose the imprint into correct perspective with your own identity. Integration with your body should erase the difficulty. I predict that you will find your senses adequately convincing."

Art's laugh was shaky. "Are you crazy, or am I?"

"Technically, you must be considered deranged. But only for a short time further. Let us now go."

"Go where?" How?"

"You do not remember even that! No matter, I can move us both."

He had time for one swooping glimpse of the body on the bed before he was propelled up *through* the ceiling and two more levels of apartments, up into the fading

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sunset sky. Up and up — the sky went black, lit with stars, and the sun's corona again peeped past the edge of Earth.

He felt no cold, no need to breathe. After the first burst of panic a numb calm spread over the surface of his plunging thoughts. Almost without volition he found himself talking to the other.

"I'll say this much, it's quite a trip. Okay, then — pretending it's real, for a minute — if I'm not Art Forrest, who the hell *am* I? And you, come to think of it?"

"Although you do not yet sound greatly like yourself, you are Tirel. I am Bexane. We are id-siblings, quadriplexed."

If he had owned a head, he would have nodded it. "I guess that makes as much sense as the rest of it." What else should he ask? — as if it made any difference. Well... "Anything else you want to tell me?"

"What is it, that you would wish to know?"

That was a stumper; it was his play. "Well...like, then, how about the rest of the family? Or are there any more?"

"Indeed, yes. You have a fine family, Tirel. Most satisfactory."

"I — I have?"

"Certainly so. And it is fitting to tell you that they will be most joyous that you return. Your wife and husband, in particular, have suffered your absence painfully."

Stop the world! I want to get back on!

But ahead, luminous to his perception, lay the great ship. And deep in his frantic mind something plunged in sudden joy.

The F&SF Competition was squeezed out of this issue. A report on Competition #7 will appear next month.

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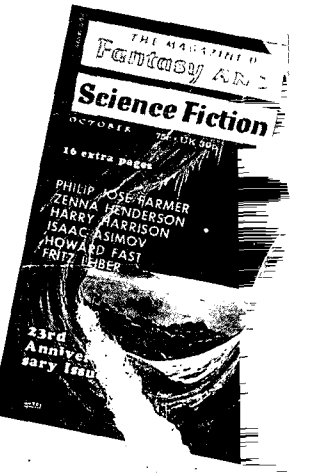

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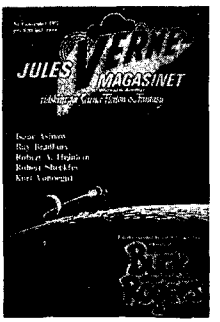

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